

# MPA NEWS



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## MPA Perspective: Defining Conservation in the Marine Realm, Including What Is (or Is Not) an MPA

**Editor's note:** Richard Kenchington is co-director of RAC Marine, a consulting firm on sustainable management of marine ecosystems and resources. From 1996-1999, he served as executive director of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in Australia.

By **Richard Kenchington**

The IUCN is now engaged in redefining the term "protected area" and reconsidering its system of categorizing such areas. The current categories system is familiar to many in the field of protected areas. It ranges from categories I and II, managed mainly for nature protection, to category VI, managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems by people. (The system is described at [www.unep-wcmc.org/protected\\_areas/categories/index.html](http://www.unep-wcmc.org/protected_areas/categories/index.html).)

From my perspective, it is important that the reworking of definitions and guidance on protected areas (PAs) does not preclude the core concept of the 1988 IUCN resolution that called for a global representative system of MPAs. In crafting its resolution, the IUCN General Assembly envisioned very large MPAs to help meet the then-anticipated commitments of nations to sustainable use and conservation of their EEZs. Comprising most if not all of a nation's EEZ, these MPAs would provide a category VI management regime for sustainable use and contain significant conservation components through categories I and II, as well as optional components of other categories.

Since then, however, two decades of PA practice and diplomatically creative ambiguity have created increasing divergence in how conservation is now envisioned. In one usage, conservation still means ecosystem-scale regimes based on sustainability, along with mandatory strict nature reserve components. While in the other, "conservation" equals "preservation", and "protected area" equals "national park".

### Conservation in the marine realm

There is often an implication that PA conservation exists where an agency can manage or exclude most uses or impacts. This is reasonable in the terrestrial realm where a protected area property has effective single-usage title and can be fenced and its access controlled, and flows are generally unidirectional and contained. There are some over-the-fence and atmospheric transfer issues, but the non-pollution issues - invasives, ferals, poaching - can, at least in theory, be addressed through in-park management.

In the marine context, however, there are multidirectional flows. Fences do not work, access is difficult to control, and scales of connectivity can be very large. Very few marine PAs are of a scale where conservation of nature can be achieved solely, or even largely, by a category I or II PA.

For the foreseeable future there are likely to be few situations in which a category I or II no-take marine PA is likely to be large enough to be managed effectively without managing significant effects from surrounding and up-current areas. We may address this by nesting and buffering such PAs within an area managed for multiple use, including sustainable fisheries with several agencies each responsible for different elements of management. Conservation may be the priority objective of one agency, but not necessarily of others (although all would be linked by an overarching objective of sustainability of use/impact and maintenance of biological diversity and ecosystem processes). This would appear to meet the criteria for category VI.

The type and the effectiveness of the management regime is the critical issue. The concept that conservation entails (a) biodiversity maintenance and (b) sustainable use can lead in the direction that all or most of a nation's EEZ should be managed through a multiple-use, category VI-type regime, including and buffering no-take I/II areas and other zones. Such a regime could be managed by a PA agency, another agency, or a partnership.

The "conservation-equals-preservation" PA concept, on the other hand, can lead to a focus on category I/II managed by a conservation agency. If that leads to targets of, say, 20% of all marine habitats in a nation's EEZ as no-take protected areas, it raises two questions:

- If the scale of unbuffered I/II PAs is such that their internal management cannot reasonably be expected to address most ecosystem services associated with conservation of nature within them, do they qualify for consideration by IUCN as protected areas?
- If sustainability of use/impact and maintenance of biological diversity and ecosystem processes is an overarching objective for an ecosystem-scale area with embedded I/II areas, but conservation is the major objective of only one agency in an equal partnership of managing agencies, would such an area qualify for consideration by IUCN as a category VI protected area?

There are inevitably circumstances that lead to significant marine/terrestrial inconsistencies. Taking (freshwater) fish but not birds or mammals within category II terrestrial parks appears to be acceptable to terrestrial protected area managers. This is clearly nonsensical in marine environments, where no-take of fish, invertebrates, and algae is as core an element of category II marine PAs as no-take of mammals, birds, vegetation, and logs is for terrestrial category II PAs. It is a dangerous nonsense when it is reflected in national policy and legislation.

There is a risk for both terrestrial and marine PAs in the quest for a single approach. In principle I favor a unifying approach. But I am increasingly concerned that it cannot be done without unacceptable and misleading compromises for marine sites, terrestrial sites, or both.

### For more information

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