

MPA NEWS



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Nations announce new MPA commitments at World Parks Congress

Leaders of several nations announced new commitments to MPA designation and management at the World Parks Congress:

Gabon announced it would designate a network of MPAs covering 23% of the nation's waters, or roughly 46,000 km². Commercial fishing will be off-limits in the network, which is intended to protect whales, sea turtles, and other marine species inhabiting the nation's coastal and offshore ecosystems. The network will include a 27,000-km² expansion of Mayumba National Park, extending out to the limit of the nation's EEZ. Currently just 1% of Gabon's waters is in MPAs. (Following the World Parks Congress, the United Arab Emirates announced it would donate a dozen speedboats and a surveillance plane to Gabon to help the latter enforce its forthcoming MPA network.)

Comoros committed to protecting 5% of its EEZ in MPAs by 2017.

Madagascar committed to tripling its MPA coverage in the next 10 years.

Australia committed to ending the dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park for capital dredge purposes. This decision relates to a controversial plan by the Australian Government to dump three million cubic meters of dredge spoil inside the marine park (MPA News [16:1](#), [15:6](#), [15:4](#)), a plan that the Government has since reversed. The Government's new proposal is to dump the spoil on land in the nearby Caley Valley wetlands, an ecosystem that hosts tens of thousands of birds from dozens of species at peak times of year. WWF Australia and other conservation groups oppose this proposal, too (www.wwf.org.au/?12200/Scientists-concerned-by-Abbot-Pt-dredge-disposal-on-Caley-Valley-wetlands).

Russia committed to increasing its MPA coverage to 170,000 km² in the next 10 years.

South Africa committed to tripling its MPA coverage in the next 10 years.

Brazil committed to protecting 5% of its marine waters by 2020.

French Polynesia committed to creating a new large-scale MPA initiative in the Austral Islands.

The Republic of Kiribati and the US signed a cooperative agreement to coordinate their respective research and protection of their adjacent MPAs: the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (Kiribati) and the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (US). The combined area, known as the Phoenix Ocean Arc, covers an ocean space totaling 1,270,000 km².

BOX: Voyage of the vakas

To open the World Parks Congress, four sailing canoes, called vakas, arrived in Sydney Harbour, completing an 11,000-km trip across the Western Pacific. Crewed by islanders from Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Fiji, and New Zealand, the vakas relied almost entirely on traditional navigation techniques. The expedition delivered the following message to the Congress from Pacific Island nations:

"We see the signs of overexploitation. We no longer see the fish and other marine creatures in the size, diversity or abundance of the past. We witness the change as foreign fishing fleets ply our waters in a race to strip our resources. Our coral reefs, the greatest in the world, and our mangrove and wetland spawning grounds are disappearing. Our ocean is vast but not limitless... growing global populations and the relentless pursuit of unsustainable development are reducing the ability of our ocean to sustain life."

For more information on the voyage and its message: www.muavoyage.com

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