

MPA NEWS



Published on *MPA News* (<https://mpanews.openchannels.org>)

Notes & News

Four companies to halt high-seas fishing in southern Indian Ocean

Four major fishing companies have announced a voluntary halt to trawling in 11 deep-sea areas of the southern Indian Ocean. The companies - Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd (Australia), Bel Ocean II Ltd (Mauritius), Sealord Group (New Zealand), and TransNamibia Fishing Pty Ltd (Namibia), which comprise the newly formed Southern Indian Ocean Deepwater Fishers' Association (SIODFA) - are the main trawling operators in the region. IUCN has called the voluntary closures "a global first" for the high seas. The IUCN press release, including details and locations of the specific sites, is available at http://www.iucn.org/en/news/archive/2006/07/2_pr_fishing_high_seas.htm.

In all, the voluntary protected areas total 309,000 km² and consist of seamounts, knolls, banks, ridges, and deep-sea coral reefs. The sites were selected by SIODFA using its own mapping of the seabed, in consultation with staff of the Fisheries Department of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. SIODFA describes several of the sites as "pristine", and says their protection will help ensure the long-term sustainability of regional fish populations. "By setting aside an area almost equal to Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, these businesses are sending a clear signal that they want to keep fish on people's plates for generations to come," said Graham Patchell, a SIODFA scientist, in a press release. To secure compliance, the companies will track their vessels' locations and activities via a satellite-based monitoring system. SIODFA has four vessels active in the southern Indian Ocean region.

"These voluntary closures are a unique innovation for effectively managing and conserving deepwater biodiversity of high-seas areas where there are no regional management arrangements in place," says Graeme Kelleher, chair of the High Seas Task Force of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. At this time, there is no Regional Fisheries Management Organization active in the southern Indian Ocean. Says Kelleher, "It is recognized that voluntary actions of this kind are extremely valuable and should be complemented by enforcement arrangements that apply to other fishing companies."

Some environmental organizations that would prefer a United Nations-imposed moratorium on all deep-sea bottom-trawl fishing on the high seas have responded with skepticism. The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (<http://www.savethehighseas.org>), representing several dozen environmental NGOs, calls the voluntary trawl closures a "half measure" designed to forestall more comprehensive and legally binding regulations.

Vanuatu waters designated a sanctuary for marine mammals, sea turtles

The government of the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu has designated all waters of the nation as a sanctuary for marine mammals and sea turtles, in which non-traditional hunting, harassment, or holding of these animals in captivity is banned. Customary harvesting by local tribes using traditional methods is still allowed, as is the export (with government permit) of marine mammals to public aquaria or swim-with-marine-mammals programs. Violators will face fines of up to Vt50 million (US\$440,000) and two years in prison.

Formal designation of the sanctuary occurred in May 2006, following an amendment of Vanuatu's Fisheries Act. Vanuatu first indicated its intent for its waters to be a sanctuary at the 2003 meeting of the South Pacific Forum, when 11 Pacific nations pledged to create a multinational, 28.5-million km² whale sanctuary in the region. The countries involved were Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Niue, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Three attempts since then by these nations to have the International Whaling Commission formally recognize the region as a whale sanctuary have been unsuccessful, falling short of the three-quarters majority needed for endorsement.

Grants available for coral reef projects

Pre-applications are due 13 November 2006 for the NOAA International Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program, operated by the International Program Office of the (US) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The program provides grants to international, governmental (except federal US agencies), and non-governmental entities working to conserve coral reefs. Grants for fiscal year 2007 are available in four categories:

- Promoting watershed management;
- Regional enhancement of MPA management effectiveness;
- Encouraging development of national MPA networks; and
- Promoting regional socioeconomic training and monitoring in coral reef management.

Country eligibility varies by grant category, and proposed work must be conducted at non-US sites. For details on categories and eligibility, go to <http://ipo.nos.noaa.gov/coralgrants.html>.

Greenpeace releases proposal for Mediterranean network of marine reserves

A new report from Greenpeace proposes the establishment of a network of marine reserves across the Mediterranean Sea, listing 32 sites that together would cover roughly 40% of the sea. The sites comprise representative examples of the region's habitats, as well as areas known to be spawning and nursery grounds. Selection was based on a manual analysis of data gathered from a variety of sources and feedback from scientists.

"Because it is virtually enclosed and its habitats inter-connected, the Mediterranean Sea is a prime example of why marine management must take account of whole ecosystems, not single species or areas," states the report. "A marine reserve network will create a sound basis upon which to build sustainable, precautionary, and ecosystem-based management of the Mediterranean's marine resources." The report is available in PDF format at <http://www.oceans.greenpeace.org/med-marine-reserves-report>.

For more information

Karli Thomas, oceans campaigner, Greenpeace International, Ottho Heldingstraat 5, 1066 AZ, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel: +31 20 718 2176; E-mail: karli.thomas@int.greenpeace.org

Palau's plan to build a self-funding network of protected areas

Government leaders in the Micronesia region joined together in March 2006 to announce the "Micronesia Challenge" - pledging to protect 30% of their nearshore marine ecosystems and 20% of terrestrial ecosystems by 2020 (*MPA News* 7:9). In addition to the political challenges inherent in reaching such a goal, the financial cost of managing such an expanded system of protected areas could be substantial.

In May 2006, the government of Palau announced how it anticipates paying for its protected area network under the challenge. The plan involves two components: a trust fund built from private and public donations, and a new tourism user fee. Larry Goddard, senior legal counsel to Palauan President Tommy Remengesau, describes for *MPA News* how this will work:

"Palau plans to establish a US\$12 million trust fund from various sources. Currently, Palau has a firm commitment from The Nature Conservancy for \$2 million and a less-firm promise from Conservation International for \$2 million. These will serve as a match to a commitment by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) of \$2 million. (The GEF funding is a portion of Palau's available \$3.5 million under various

environmental conventions - climate change, biodiversity, etc.) The intent is to use this \$6 million to leverage funds from public and private partners over the next year to reach our \$12 million goal. We are currently having discussions with numerous countries (including Japan and European Union members) and various private NGOs to raise the remaining amount.

"In addition to the \$12 million, we are seeking to establish a tourism user fee that will also go toward our protected area network. We have had preliminary discussions with both houses of our congress to establish this fee. Together, these two funding sources will make Palau the first self-funding protected area network in the world."

For more information

Larry Goddard, Office of the President, P.O. Box 6051, Palau, PW 96940. E-mail: proplag@palaunet.com

Source URL: <https://mpanews.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/notes-news-39#comment-0>