

MPA NEWS



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Notes & news: Barbuda - Spain - Scotland - MPA planning - MPA film fest

Barbuda designates five MPAs as part of new ocean plan

In August the Barbuda Council - which governs half of the twin-island Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda - instituted a sweeping set of regulations to transform its ocean management and conservation. The measures include a zoning plan for its coastal waters, a network of five new no-take MPAs covering 33% (139 km²) of inshore habitats, and island-wide bans on the catching of parrotfish and sea urchins. The latter organisms are herbivores necessary for controlling algal growth on coral reefs.

The new regulations also feature a prohibition on the use of fishing nets in 16% of coastal waters, including anywhere within 20 meters of a coral reef. And anchoring by visiting boats is now restricted to four anchoring zones, to protect seabed habitats.

The regulations are the outcome of a community-driven process that occurred over the past year and a half. The process was under the umbrella of the Barbuda Blue Halo Initiative, a collaboration among the Barbuda Council, Government of Antigua & Barbuda, Barbuda Fisheries Division, Codrington Lagoon Park, and the Waitt Institute. The Waitt Institute provided the science, mapping, and communications for the initiative, and offered policy recommendations.

The initiative aimed to balance current and future needs to use ocean resources. "No part of this is meant to hurt fishers," said Arthur Nibbs, chairman of the Barbuda Council and Antigua and Barbuda Minister of Fisheries. "It's the reverse - ensuring that they have a livelihood that will last in perpetuity."

"The state of Caribbean reefs and fisheries is dire, but the policy solutions are simple," said Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, executive director of the Waitt Institute and coordinator of the Barbuda Blue Halo Initiative. An essay by Johnson on the new regulations, including a map of the zones, is at <https://www.openchannels.org/node/7375>.

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Spain designates three sites to protect Mediterranean seabed habitats

In August 2014, Spain designated three new Fisheries Restricted Areas in waters near the Balearic Islands in the western Mediterranean. The new MPAs protect vulnerable marine ecosystems through a bottom trawling and dredging ban around Emile Baudot seamount (a 300 km² protected area), Ausias March seamount (65 km²), and Fort d'en Moreay Reef (30 km²). Other gears, including longline, will still be permitted.

The seabed ecosystems feature coralligenous communities and maerl beds, which provide important habitat for a variety of commercial and protected species in the Mediterranean. The designations follow several years of advocacy by Oceana, and bring Spain into compliance with 2006 European legislation obligating EU Member States to protect the coralligenous and rhodolith areas of the Mediterranean. The Spanish Government's announcement, in Spanish, is at www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2014-8645.

Scottish Government closes MPA when fisherman violates voluntary agreement

The Scottish Government has instituted an urgent Marine Conservation Order (MCO) to protect a fragile marine ecosystem in the South Arran MPA, off the Scottish island of Arran. The MCO immediately prohibits fishing in the 250-km² site until more permanent protective measures are put in place in 2015. The order comes in response to a scallop dredger's breach of a less formal, "voluntary" agreement between Scotland's marine authorities and fishermen to avoid fishing in the MPA. The voluntary agreement had been intended as a stop gap until more formal protective measures could be implemented.

The MCO is the first to be put in place under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010. The South Arran MPA is home to maerl beds. Maerl is a coralline red algae that serves as nursery habitat for scallops and other species. For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/ArranMCO>.

MPAs should be planned to protect vulnerable ecosystem functions, not just biodiversity

A global study published in the journal *Ecology Letters* concludes that tropical MPAs have generally been sited to protect species richness (i.e., large numbers of species) but not the species that provide key and difficult-to-replace functions in their ecosystems. The study examined 169 tropical sites worldwide and found that many areas with threatened but functionally important fish were outside of existing MPAs.

The concept of functional redundancy is key to the study. If only one species of fish provides a certain function in an ecosystem - say, eating a particular type of algae on a coral reef - that ecosystem is more vulnerable than if multiple species were performing that same function. The study's authors suggest these vulnerable ecosystems should be protected, not just the species-rich ones. "The recognition that all species are not the same and that some play more important and different roles in ocean ecology prompted this new investigation," says Tim McClanahan, Senior Conservationist with the Wildlife Conservation Society and a co-author of the study.

McClanahan says that if MPAs continue to focus on species rather than function and mismanage those species with low species-redundancy functions, this will eventually reduce fisheries production and ecosystem services. "Protecting function with low redundancy needs to be an important part of management," he says. "The assumption that diversity may be a proxy for vulnerable functions on the larger biogeographic scale was shown to be incorrect in this paper. This finding undermines many of the current key assumptions of global-level planning and policy for protected area investments."

The paper "Global mismatch between species richness and vulnerability of reef fish assemblages" is available at <http://bit.ly/redundancystudy>.

Film festival on MPAs

The second edition of the INMARE Film Festival - the festival dedicated to videos and documentaries filmed in MPAs - will be held 5-8 December 2014 in Camogli, Italy. It is co-hosted by the Camogli City Council and the nearby Portofino Marine Reserve. "INMARE's mission is to show viewers the aquatic realm's beauty and versatility, make them aware of its fragility, and remind them of the obligation to protect this wonderful world for future generations," says festival director Angelo Mojetta. For more information or to submit a film for consideration, go to www.inmarefestival.eu.

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