

MPA NEWS



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Notes & news: High seas - Finland - MPA enforcement legislation - Great Barrier Reef

UN agrees to draft international agreement to protect high seas

After nine years of deliberations, the United Nations agreed in January 2015 to convene an intergovernmental conference to draft a treaty for governing waters beyond national jurisdiction. Although this basically amounts to an agreement to draft an agreement, it is a significant step toward the future conservation of marine life in the world's high seas - including the possibility of a worldwide system of MPAs beyond just national waters. (The high seas comprise 64% of the global ocean but have almost no MPAs.)

A special preparatory committee comprising all UN member states will start work in 2016 to craft a draft treaty on high seas biodiversity under UNCLOS, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. There is no agreed-upon deadline for finalizing the treaty.

"Though the final results remain uncertain, many have high hopes for the new treaty," says Kristina Gjerde, IUCN senior high seas advisor. "It could help secure the designation of a truly global system of marine protected areas; mainstream biodiversity conservation into the governance of high seas fisheries, shipping, and seabed mining; and provide for more effective access to marine genetic resources. The treaty could also foster important new scientific and commercial discoveries while ensuring the benefits are shared by all."

For more information, visit the website of the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of 27 NGOs (plus IUCN) that has advocated for such a UN agreement: <http://highseasalliance.org>

Finland designates 11 new MPAs

In January 2015, Finland designated 11 new marine and coastal protected areas covering an overall area of 720 km². The newly protected ecosystems include reefs, sandbanks, islands, and more. These new sites bring the total MPA coverage under the auspices of HELCOM - the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, which includes nine nations - to 174 sites covering 540,400 km², or about 12% of the Baltic Sea. For more information, visit <http://helcom.fi/news/Pages/Network-of-Baltic-marine-protected-areas-expands-in-Finland.aspx>

Best practices in MPA enforcement legislation

A new report analyzes best practices in MPA enforcement legislation in the Caribbean region. Published by the Environmental Law Institute, the study identifies the similarities and differences in statutes across eight Caribbean nations, and examines how violations are prosecuted and what penalties are available. It is intended to provide a basis for individual countries and the Caribbean as a whole to improve the legal foundations for MPA enforcement.

"Legal Frameworks for MPA Enforcement in the Caribbean: Challenges and Opportunities" is available at <http://eli-ocean.org/mpa/caribbean-mpa-enforcement>

Great Barrier Reef in the news

In June 2015 at its annual meeting, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee will again consider whether the Great Barrier Reef should be added to the list of World Heritage in Danger in light of various threats the site faces, including runoff and coastal development (*MPA News* 15.6 and 16.1). In the run-up to that meeting, the Great Barrier Reef has been the focus of reports and other publications examining its overall health and what is needed to protect the ecosystem over the long term. Here are some recent ones:

State Party Report on the State of Conservation of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (Australia): In Response to the World Heritage Committee Decision. By the Australian Government Department of the Environment. <http://bit.ly/GBRstatepartyreport>

- WWF Australia's response to the State Party Report. www.wwf.org.au/?12560/Australias-report-to-UNESCO-denies-serious-decline-of-Great-Barrier-Reef
- Six things Queensland's next government must do to save the Great Barrier Reef. By Bob Pressey, Alana Grech, Jon Brodie, and Jon Day. <https://theconversation.com/six-things-queenslands-next-government-must-do-to-save-the-great-barrier-reef-36258>

From the MPA News vault: Features and news items from yesteryear

Five years ago: January-February 2010 (*MPA News* 11.4)

- The reserve effect on fisheries: In light of recent studies, should it be considered settled science?
- Letters to the editor: Seismic surveys and MPAs

Ten years ago: February 2005 (*MPA News* 6.7)

- Assessing tsunami damage to Indian Ocean MPAs: Efforts underway to find answers amid chaos
- IUCN recommends temporary ban on high-seas bottom trawling

Fifteen years ago: February 2000 (*MPA News* 1.5)

- Bahamas to create no-take reserve network to protect fisheries, fishermen
- Council calls for several new no-take reserves in Australian state of Victoria

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