

MPA NEWS

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Kiribati to close Phoenix Islands Protected Area to commercial fishing at end of 2014

The Kiribati government has approved a plan to close the country's 408,250-km² Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) to commercial fishing by the start of 2015. The decision, made on 29 January 2014, marks a significant leap in protection for PIPA. At present, just 12% of the site is closed to purse seining, the predominant commercial fishing industry in the region ([MPA News 15:1](#)). PIPA covers roughly one-ninth of Kiribati's 3.5-million km² EEZ.

"This is a milestone achievement of the Republic of Kiribati, especially due to the fact the nation has no land-based resources, and has only its seas to rely on for economic growth and for survival of its 110,000 citizens," says Betarim Rimom, PIPA information officer. Kiribati's revenue comes largely from selling fishing licenses to foreign tuna fleets. The purpose of the full closure is to help conserve the regionally and globally important tuna stocks, as PIPA waters include significant spawning grounds.

Until the decision to close PIPA to commercial fishing, a unique financing arrangement underpinned the site's protection: the "reverse fishing license". This arrangement tied the gradual phase-out of commercial fishing in PIPA to the raising of funds. The more money that was received in PIPA's endowment, the more of the site would be placed off-limits to commercial fishing.

In April 2014, Kiribati, Conservation International, and the New England Aquarium formally agreed that there will be no net loss in Kiribati revenue due to the full closure of PIPA to commercial fishing. For this to happen, the PIPA endowment must be capitalized sufficiently to pay back the Government for any loss in revenue it incurs. Currently the endowment holds US \$2.5 million from the Kiribati government and an equivalent amount from Conservation International. Other private donors have reportedly agreed to add more funds to the endowment from the start of 2015.

A brief announcement by PIPA of the government's January 2014 decision is at www.phoenixislands.org/shownews.php?newsid=88.

New Caledonia officially designates 1.3 million-km² MPA

Following its announcements in 2012 and 2013 that it intended to designate a large MPA in its EEZ, the government of the French territory of New Caledonia has made it official. In May 2014, the government designated the Coral Sea Natural Park, which encompasses the country's entire 1.3 million-km² EEZ. It is the largest protected area in the world, marine or terrestrial.

The MPA will be zoned for multi-use, and a management plan will be developed over the next three years. Fishing is expected to be allowed to some extent, and seabed mining has also been discussed ([MPA News 14:2](#)). The government's announcement (in French) is at www.afmar.gouv.nc/portal/page/portal/afmar/librairie/fichiers/26348255.PDF.

Nations sign declaration to conserve Sargasso Sea

In March 2014, the governments of Bermuda, the Azores, Monaco, the UK, and the US signed a declaration committing to the conservation of the Sargasso Sea, a vast area of the subtropical North Atlantic. The Sargasso Sea supports a range of endemic species, and most of it lies in waters beyond national jurisdiction. The non-binding declaration seeks protection for the sea using international bodies that regulate areas beyond national jurisdiction, such as the International Maritime Organization, regional fisheries authorities, and the Convention on Migratory Species. A link to the declaration is at www.sargassoalliance.org/hamilton-declaration.

New Zealand designates three new subantarctic marine reserves

New Zealand has designated three new marine reserves surrounding the Antipodes, Bounty, and Campbell Islands in the nation's remote subantarctic waters. Together the reserves cover 4350 km² and comprise critical breeding sites for marine mammals and seabirds. No fishing, mining, or petroleum exploration will be allowed inside the reserve boundaries. The Government stated the new reserves expand the protected portion of New Zealand's territorial sea from 7.1% to 9.5%, although conservationists noted less than 1% of New Zealand's entire national waters (including the EEZ) is fully protected. Information on each of the reserves is at www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-visit/southland/subantarctic-islands.

Study: New Zealand public thinks 30% of marine environment is no-take

The New Zealand public believes that roughly 30% of the nation's waters are protected in no-take areas, whereas less than 1% of the waters actually are. This is one finding of a series of surveys of the New Zealand public on marine conservation issues; the survey results were published in *Marine Policy* journal this year (www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X14000062). The study points out that similar public knowledge gaps about MPA coverage have been identified elsewhere, including in the US and UK.

Updates on Great Barrier Reef and coal port expansion

This June, the annual meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee will decide whether to add the Great Barrier Reef to its list of World Heritage in Danger, a year after expressing continued concern to the Australian and Queensland governments over the level of coastal development adjacent to the reef ([MPA News 15:1](#)).

Earlier this year, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority approved a government proposal to dump three million cubic meters of dredge spoils inside the marine park area (<http://bit.ly/abbotpointdecision>). The dredge spoils would be produced during the significant expansion of a coal export terminal next to the park. A preparatory document for the upcoming UNESCO meeting (<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2014/whc14-38com-7B-en.pdf>) indicates concern that the government's dredge plan disregards less impacting disposal options.

Meanwhile, the Mackay Conservation Group, a Queensland-based NGO, has filed suit against the Australian government over the dumping plan, saying the plan violates a federal obligation to protect World Heritage sites (www.mackayconservationgroup.org.au/mcg_in_court).

Toolkit available for advocacy of MPAs

WWF has launched a website that aims to assist MPA practitioners, advocates, communicators and other professionals involved in MPA establishment and management. Called the MPA Advocacy Toolkit, it includes a wide array of reports, infographics, videos, and other resources to support arguments in favor of MPAs. The toolkit is for registered use only. Register at www.mpaaction.org. The toolkit will be

updated regularly with new material. If you have relevant material to add or suggestions for improving the toolkit, please contact the toolkit team at info@mpaaction.org.

Seeking nominations for new members of MPA Federal Advisory Committee

The (US) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is seeking nominations to fill ten vacancies on the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee for 2014. The committee advises the Departments of Commerce and the Interior on the development and implementation of a national system of MPAs to connect and strengthen the nation's MPA programs. Nominations for representatives of ocean industries; commercial and recreational fishing; Tribal and/or Pacific Islanders; State coastal or ocean agencies; natural and social science; cultural resource management; non-consumptive uses; and conservation interests are sought by 30 May 2014.

Self-nominations are accepted. Details on the nominations are at <http://marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov/fac/membership>.

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