

MPA NEWS

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Perspective | Report on the Think Tank on Human Dimensions of Large Scale MPAs

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Although the median size of MPAs worldwide is less than two square kilometers, it is the very large MPAs - those larger than about 250,000 km² in area - that account for a majority of conserved ocean area globally.

Due to the size of these large scale MPAs (LSMPAs), they can impact multiple communities and stakeholder groups. As well, even when they are initiated by local communities or NGOs, they must still be established by national governments. The process overall can feel top-down and, if not handled appropriately, can leave stakeholders feeling alienated. These factors, among others, can make it easy to characterize LSMPAs as being designated primarily for political gain, and as a conservation model that disenfranchises local communities and indigenous people.

In February of this year, site managers, social scientists and other experts gathered to examine how the human dimensions of LSMPAs can be addressed more effectively. That started with the structure of the meeting itself.

Placing the voices of people and communities at the fore

The Think Tank on Human Dimensions of Large Scale Marine Protected Areas (or HDTT) - held 8-10 February 2016 in Honolulu, Hawai'i - was a meeting of the minds, with 125 participants from 17 countries. These included site managers and staff from 10 of the world's largest MPAs, as well as dozens of marine policy specialists and research professionals from academic institutions worldwide. Attendees also included representatives of governments, NGOs, indigenous and traditional communities, industry, and the next generation of marine management and research professionals, including graduate students and post-doctorate researchers.

The HDTT opened with Native Hawaiian chant and hula to honor the host culture and people, welcome participants, and create an atmosphere of inclusiveness and mutual respect. The first formal session of each day featured a panel of site managers, social scientists, and conservation practitioners to address critical management topics. Subsequent sessions included 'ignite talk' presentations - which addressed trends in ocean governance, economic, cultural and legal considerations of LSMPAs, and food security in a speed round format - and small group exercises. The latter allowed participants to evaluate human dimension (HD) knowledge gaps, identify priority research needs, and share and discuss relevant LSMPA experiences and best management practices and suggestions. On the final day, participants enthusiastically decided to establish a community of practice (CoP) around HD for LSMPAs with statements of commitment being offered from 12 academic, NGO and government institutions. A subset of participants began drafting a code of conduct to ensure that the actions of the CoP would reinforce and enhance best-practice standards.

Diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives were respected throughout the design, planning and implementation phases of the HDTT. The partnership remained committed to honoring the spirit of human dimensions - placing the voices of people and communities at the fore to identify and develop strategies that address the needs of people and place simultaneously.

Findings on best practices, a shared research agenda, code of conduct, and goals of a community of practice were outcomes of the HDTT, and have been organized into an overarching framework. That framework is now being reviewed by HDTT donors and participants and then will be disseminated broadly.

Why was the HDTT important?

- The HDTT organizing partners (see footnote) all had a keen desire to do HD work. We felt it was important to identify common interests and to leverage the resources of all parties to create a collaborative output greater than what any one institution could develop independently.
- The HDTT partnership saw this as the first systematic, broad initiative to formally address HD for LSMPAs in a way that could affect real world change, namely by incorporating the perspectives and expertise of researchers, practitioners and community. Our goal is to increase the success of LSMPAs, and marine resource management and conservation generally, through an increased understanding of how people and organizations interact with LSMPAs and related management tools.
- For social scientists and managers who wish to play constructive roles in addressing the interesting and complex challenges of LSMPAs, the HDTT created an important starting point. Tools and services can now be developed to assist nations in drafting more effective policies, and management teams can begin to develop and implement activities that consider human communities systematically and respectfully from the earliest stages of the LSMPA design process.

What do we see as immediate next steps?

- Further develop the HD of LSMPA Framework
- Support development of the HD of LSMPA Community of Practice
- Publish several key articles and guidelines to engage the conservation community more broadly
- Identify and pursue the most relevant proposed research activities from the HDTT
- Complete planning for a follow-on workshop at the World Conservation Congress (1-10 September 2016)
- Assess whether engaging with Chilean colleagues (in conjunction with IMPAC4 in 2017) to host a combined Biophysical / HD Think Tank is feasible
- Engage interested parties to constructively and enthusiastically support this effort. Please contact: naia@bigoceanmanagers.org (Big Ocean) and hdmpas@uw.edu (University of Washington)

Footnote:

Workshop co-organizers came from a diversity of implementation and academic institutions including Big Ocean, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, the University of Washington, the University of British Columbia, Colorado State University, the University of Guelph, and the University of Victoria. HDTT title sponsors included NOAA, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Geographic Pristine Seas project, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and Conservation International.

HDTT leads included the authors of this piece as well as 'Aulani Wilhelm (Conservation International), Nathan Bennett (University of British Columbia and University of Washington), Rebecca Gruby

(Colorado State University), Noella Gray (University of Guelph), Natalie Ban (University of Victoria, Sue Taei (Conservation International), Jon Day (James Cook University), Alan Friedlander (University of Hawaii), and Jacqueline Evans (Cook Islands Marine Park / Marae Moana)

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