

MPA NEWS



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

Recent Developments toward a System of High-Seas MPAs: An Interview with Kristina Gjerde

As recent as 2000, there was little discussion within international government on the concept of protecting high-seas ecosystems with MPAs. Despite concern that deep-sea habitats outside national jurisdictions were threatened by largely unregulated human activities, the lack of a dedicated legal framework for applying MPAs in international waters was a major obstacle to addressing the problem.

Now that is beginning to change, thanks in part to the work of Kristina Gjerde. As high seas policy advisor to the IUCN Global Marine Programme and coordinator of the High Seas MPA Task Force for the World Commission on Protected Areas, Gjerde has spent much of the past few years building support among scientists and policy makers for high-seas protection. The result: major intergovernmental institutions, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN General Assembly itself, have now taken up the issue. This month, following Gjerde's release of two publications on high-seas protection ([see box](#) at end of article), *MPA News* talked with her about recent progress toward a system of MPAs on the high seas.

MPA News: In your essay in the June 2006 edition of *PARKS* magazine, you write about some of the recent progress that has been made in favor of high-seas protection. What are some examples?

Kristina Gjerde: I'll note three areas. First, due to the promptings of scientists and others, the United Nations convened a working group in February 2006 to study issues related to high-seas biodiversity. The meeting was useful in building consensus toward action, but it is clear that further discussions and concrete proposals are necessary. It is hoped that another working group will be convened in 2007 to provide an opportunity for discussing a range of options for immediate and longer-term action.

Second, a formal UN process has been established to review actions taken by nations and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) to protect vulnerable high-seas ecosystems from destructive fishing practices. This review, required under a 2004 resolution by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), will also determine whether further actions - such as an interim prohibition on high-seas bottom trawling - are warranted. A report will be released on July 14 that describes actions taken, and the official UNGA review will occur in October 2006.

Third, the FAO convened a workshop in June 2006 on preparing guidelines on the role of MPAs in fisheries management. This was in response to a 2005 decision by the FAO Committee on Fisheries that the organization should assist members in meeting the 2012 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) goal for representative MPA networks. The results of the workshop will help pave the way for governments and RFMOs to more fully understand the benefits and roles of MPAs as both fisheries management and biodiversity conservation tools.

MPA News: What potential development, if it were to happen, would have the greatest positive effect on high-seas protection?

Gjerde: A resolution by UNGA calling for a temporary prohibition of high-seas bottom trawling would provide the greatest positive benefit. It would reflect that governments have acknowledged their responsibility to protect high-seas biodiversity and their obligation to reign in destructive fishing practices. This would set an important precedent for ensuring that States and RFMOs are held accountable by the full global community for actions impacting high-seas biodiversity.

MPA News: At the World Parks Congress in 2003, a target was set to have at least five ecologically significant MPAs designated on the high seas by 2008 (*MPA News* 5:4). Will that target be met?

Gjerde: There is a realistic chance. The Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Commission could in 2007 decide to provide permanent protection to five areas - four seamounts and part of the Reykjanes Ridge - that were granted interim, three-year protection from bottom fishing activities in 2004. Some members of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment in the Northeast Atlantic have already expressed an interest in including these five areas as part of the OSPAR network of MPAs, so through cooperation between the two regional organizations, these five areas could become effective high-seas MPAs.

Progress is also underway in the Southern Ocean. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in June agreed to work with the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to develop a comprehensive system of MPAs for the Southern Ocean. Although the development of biogeographic classification systems for a representative network of MPAs may take a while to develop, the process could start to identify priority areas for protection by 2008.

MPA News: What are your thoughts on the announcement by four major fishing companies to refrain from bottom trawling in parts of the southern Indian Ocean (see news brief "Four companies to halt high-seas fishing..." below)?

Gjerde: I am pleased that the leaders in the deepwater fishing industry have recognized the need for protecting benthic habitats from the impact of bottom trawling and have acknowledged that adequate enforcement mechanisms exist that can monitor their own compliance.

However, there is still a need for governments and RFMOs to speedily adopt and implement legally binding mechanisms both in the southern Indian Ocean and throughout the high seas to conserve deep-sea biodiversity and to ensure ecologically sustainable fisheries. An immediate interim prohibition on high-seas bottom trawling in areas where there are no RFMOs would buy the time necessary to adopt such legally binding measures and to prevent fishing from spreading into new and possibly more sensitive areas.

For more information

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BOX: New publications on protection of high-seas biodiversity

In June 2006, three publications were released on the topic of protecting high-seas biodiversity. The first one provides a broad overview of the scientific, economic and legal aspects; the second focuses on the use of MPAs for this purpose; the third addresses more broadly the use of ecosystem approaches:

Ecosystems and Biodiversity in Deep Waters and High Seas

Authored by Kristina Gjerde and published by the Regional Seas Programme of the UN Environment Programme in cooperation with IUCN.
http://www.unep.org/pdf/IUCN_Report_16June06.pdf

PARKS magazine, Vol. 15, No. 3, special issue on high-seas marine protected areas

Co-edited by Kristina Gjerde and Graeme Kelleher and published by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas.
http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/pubs/pdfs/PARKS/15_3_lowres.pdf

Implementing the Ecosystem Approach in Open Ocean and Deep Sea Environments: An Analysis of Stakeholders, Their Interests, and Existing Approaches

Authored by Marjo Vierros, Fanny Douvère, and Salvatore Arico and published by United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies.
http://www.ias.unu.edu/binaries2/DeepSea_Stakeholders.pdf

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