

# MPA NEWS



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## Results from MPA News Poll: Which MPA is "World's Largest"?

With the intent of encouraging readers to consider where various ocean areas managed for conservation fit along the continuum of "marine protected areas", the [August 2006 edition](#) of *MPA News* polled readers on which MPA constitutes the largest one in the world, and why. To answer from among the six available choices, readers had to decide first which sites qualified as MPAs. The choices ranged from a relatively archetypal MPA (the recently designated 362,000-km<sup>2</sup> Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument) to more unorthodox choices like the International Whaling Commission's Indian Ocean whale sanctuary or even the high seas, which are subject to a UN moratorium on large-scale pelagic driftnet fishing.

With the poll results in, it is clear there is no consensus on this issue. None of the candidates earned more than 22% of the votes cast. For what it is worth, there was a three-way tie for most votes: the Mediterranean/Black Seas bottom trawl closure; the marine area covered under the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Living Marine Resources (CCAMLR); and a write-in candidate mentioned by multiple respondents - the entire world oceans. Although the number of votes was too small to be scientifically conclusive, we present a selection of responses below to illustrate readers' conceptions of how to assess the world's largest MPAs. These have been edited by *MPA News* for length and content:

**Answer:** Write-in candidate - Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (344,400 km<sup>2</sup>)

**Reason given:** "In terms of the diversity and size of ecosystems protected and the ways in which they are managed, I consider the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) to be the largest MPA. The GBRMP remains the world's best managed protected area: there is no guarantee yet that the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument, which is larger in size, is not just another paper park."

**Answer:** Mediterranean/Black Seas bottom trawl closure (1.63 million km<sup>2</sup>)

**Reason given:** "This closure offers a degree of protection in law. Conventions and codes, such as pertain to the CCAMLR area, the Indian Ocean whale sanctuary, and the high seas, do not require non-members' compliance and are toothless to a great extent in ensuring members' compliance."

**Answer:** CCAMLR area (35.7 million km<sup>2</sup>)

**Reason given:** "This is an actively managed area, in contrast to the high seas or the Indian Ocean whale sanctuary."

**Answer:** Write-in candidate - the world oceans (361 million km<sup>2</sup>)

**Reason given:** "As Wikipedia notes, 'The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) bans all nuclear explosions in all environments, for military or civilian purposes.' Thus, under the IUCN definition for 'marine protected area', the world oceans qualify as an MPA via the CTBT. The Treaty has been pretty effective for the oceans: there have not been any nuclear bomb tests there since it was opened for signing in 1996."

### BOX: Do not "quibble over definitions"

*MPA News* received the following response to the reader poll from Doug Myers, habitat restoration manager for the Puget Sound Action Team, which coordinates and implements conservation plans for the Puget Sound waterway on behalf of the Washington state government (US):

"I think all of the areas mentioned in the poll are good starts for improved planetary management of marine resources, and we should welcome any kind of designation/protection measure rather than quibble over definitions [regarding which ones should be considered MPAs or not]. We should use these designations as springboards for discussion on increasing protections worldwide, including the economic discussions of long-term vs. short-term benefits and strategic placement of MPAs to protect biodiversity between national borders. It may be appropriate to reopen some areas to limited fishing activity once stocks have recovered.

"The bigger challenge is keeping a lid on fishery quotas and enforcing that lid under considerable political pressure. Like terrestrial protected areas, MPAs are often negotiated to places where the least political resistance exists, or used to placate environmental stakeholders in cases where the alternative policy of reducing fisheries quotas would be political suicide for managers. To truly rebuild the world's fisheries, more ambitious closures, species quotas, and buyouts will be needed. Large MPAs by whatever definition demonstrate political will and re-educate people that our actions, both positive and negative, have planetary implications."

**For more information:**

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