

MPA NEWS



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South Africa Designates 180,000-km² MPA; Will Be Enforced Jointly with Commercial Fishing Industry

In April, South Africa designated its first offshore MPA: a 180,000-km² site surrounding two small sub-Antarctic islands. Located nearly 1800 km southeast of the country's mainland, the new Prince Edward Islands MPA is intended to protect the millions of seabirds and seals that visit the islands to breed. It is also intended to contribute to the recovery of toothfish populations in the area, which were decimated by overfishing in the 1990s.

The MPA's zoning system includes a no-take Sanctuary Zone covering 17,903 km², or roughly 10% of the MPA. (That zone, in the middle of the MPA, encompasses the two islands, Marion Island and Prince Edward Island.) The other zones feature various use restrictions, but will allow fishing for some species using certain gear types. Continued fishing for toothfish, for example, will be permitted in the MPA by two South African vessels operating under strict quota and longline hook limits.

The new MPA is the culmination of several years of planning. The South African government first announced its intent to declare an MPA there in 2004. It re-announced its intent in 2009, partly in response to the country's National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, which it adopted that year ([MPA News 10:11](#)). Soon after that, though, a cabinet reshuffle split the government's marine and coastal responsibilities between two departments - Fisheries and Environmental Affairs - resulting in delays as the respective mandates were worked out. Once the responsibilities were resolved (Environmental Affairs will manage the MPA, including fisheries enforcement there), the final stakeholder consultation process took place.

Cooperative solutions to enforcement challenge

As with any large and remote MPA, enforcing the use restrictions in the Prince Edward Islands MPA poses a challenge, particularly for a nation with relatively limited offshore enforcement capacity. (South Africa has one dedicated offshore enforcement vessel). So, to add another layer of surveillance ability, the stakeholder consultation process focused on the two South African fishing vessels that work in the region.

"In the stakeholder engagement, the intention was always to try to use the permitted South African fishing vessels to become part of the solution in monitoring illegal fishing within the MPA," says Peter Chadwick of WWF South Africa, which was instrumental in the planning process. "They will in effect act as crucial eyes and ears in these difficult-to-monitor waters. Through being allowed the opportunity to have a capped fishing quota, they will aid in preventing other illegal vessels from plundering the recovering stocks."

Xola Mkefe, director of coastal and biodiversity conservation in South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs, says the remote location of the MPA requires that it be managed in an array of cooperative ways. In addition to the arrangement with fishing companies, he says, "We are also seeking to further enhance cooperation with the Australian and French governments, who regularly patrol their sovereign territories of Heard Island and the Crozet Islands, located to the east of the Prince Edward Islands. The agreement with France, which has a land-based satellite monitoring control station in the Southern Ocean, is being finalized. We are discussing a treaty with Australia that includes monitoring and surveillance in the sub-Antarctic waters."

Most of the MPA is also within the regional jurisdiction of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), of which South Africa is a member. CCAMLR requires the fishing vessels of all 20 of its member states to carry Vessel Monitoring Systems, which report regularly to the CCAMLR head office and the country affected.

To put the size of the Prince Edward Islands MPA in perspective, it is more than twice the size of the countries of Jordan, Portugal, or Hungary. Yet the MPA is nearly uninhabited. The only human residence is on Marion Island, which has a small research and weather station and is the larger of the two islands at 290 km². Twenty-eight species of seabirds - including penguins and several types of albatross - are thought or known to use the two islands as breeding habitat.

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