

MPA NEWS



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Tech tools launched at WPC to visualize global fishing activity, coral reefs

Two innovative technology tools were featured at the World Parks Congress:

Global Fishing Watch (www.globalfishingwatch.org):

This new tool, currently in prototype form, is designed to eventually allow the public to monitor the activity of commercial fishing vessels worldwide, including if those vessels are straying into no-fishing zones. The prototype displays routes taken by more than three thousand commercial fishing vessels in 2012 and 2013, as indicated by transmissions from the vessels' onboard Automatic Identification Systems (AIS). Based on various factors, Global Fishing Watch predicts whether each vessel was actively fishing at any particular place and time. Eventually the positioning data will be available in real-time, say the developers - a partnership of Oceana (oceana.org), SkyTruth (skytruth.org), and Google. (FISH-i Africa, a somewhat similar but unrelated program for monitoring illegal fishing in southeast African countries, already coordinates real-time monitoring of AIS data by regional authorities: <http://bit.ly/FISH-i>.)

Challenges face any tool that is based on AIS data. Among these, vessels are currently allowed to turn off their AIS whenever they want, and there is reportedly software available that enables vessels to hack their own AIS transmissions, sending out false location information (<http://bit.ly/wiredGFWarticle>). That being said, the Global Fishing Watch prototype was greeted with significant enthusiasm at the World Parks Congress.

Release of GBR visual record from Catlin Seaview Survey (www.catlinseaviewsurvey.com):

The Catlin Seaview Survey, which aims to create a baseline photographic record of coral reef health worldwide, released more than 100,000 images that the project has taken of the Great Barrier Reef since 2012, spanning 32 locations along the 2300-km reef. Publicly available for the first time, this visual record provides high-definition, 360-degree underwater views, with accurate GPS locations. The viewing effect is similar to Google's Street View on land, and allows for easy comparisons of reef health over time. Project partners include insurance firm Catlin (catlin.com), the University of Queensland (www.gci.uq.edu.au), Google, and Underwater Earth (underwaterearth.org).

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