

## “Sister MPAs”: Building International Relationships Between Sites to Share Lessons

When practitioners face the challenges of MPA planning and management — financing, monitoring, enforcement, and so forth — knowledge of how peers have addressed similar challenges can be invaluable. This sharing of lessons can take many forms. Among the most effective, and intensive, is the direct exchange of personnel between sites, allowing managers and stakeholders to experience first-hand how MPAs with similar goals and concerns do their work. Often a component of building “sister” relationships between MPAs, these exchanges can be mutually beneficial for both sides, stimulating better management through fresh ideas.

Such exchanges are often easiest to conduct within national borders, for financial and logistical reasons. But for pairs of sites that share resources across international borders, or whose similarities and opportunities for partnering outweigh the financial and logistical challenges, international exchanges can be a rewarding experience. This month, *MPA News* examines three cases of how such international relationships have been arranged and implemented.

### Linking the chain: Commander Islands (Russia) and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (US)

The Aleutian Islands are a chain of small volcanic isles that span the Bering Sea, stretching 1900 km from the Alaskan Peninsula of the US toward the coast of Kamchatka, Russia. Although maps generally suggest the Aleutian archipelago ends at the US border, just 200 km westward lies a group of islands sharing many Aleutian ecological characteristics: Russia’s *Komandorsky Ostrova*, or the Commander Islands.

To conserve their respective Aleutian ecosystems, both nations have designated large protected areas. *Komandorsky Zapovednik*, or the Commander Islands Nature and Biosphere Reserve (CINBR), is Russia’s largest MPA, with 34,633 km<sup>2</sup> of marine area. The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR) is roughly 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> in total, including most islands of the archipelago. The missions of the two protected areas are different in a notable way: while AMNWR was designated expressly to protect seabirds, marine mammals, and the marine resources on which they rely, CINBR is

intended to balance biodiversity conservation with the needs of human communities within the reserve. Despite this difference, the sites possess a common ecosystem, with birds, sea lions and other wildlife regularly crossing the MPA borders. Effective management of these shared resources requires cooperation.

“Both protected areas can realize benefits by working together,” says Tom Van Pelt, an international conservation biologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal agency that oversees the Alaskan refuge. “For example, AMNWR and CINBR share important species of birds, such as the rare red-legged kittiwake, that form Bering Sea-wide metapopulations. It makes sense for each area to view the other as an extension of its management interest.”

In March 2005, Van Pelt co-organized a workshop that brought CINBR Director Nik Pavlov and Education Specialist Natalia Fomina to AMNWR headquarters in Alaska for three days. The workshop, called “Linking the Chain”, was intended to formalize a new sister-refuge relationship between the MPAs through person-to-person meetings. It involved briefings on the sites’ respective biodiversity and programs, and extensive brainstorming on opportunities for transboundary cooperation in conservation, monitoring, research, education, and threat prevention. (Oil spills are a major concern for both sites, as described in *MPA News* 6:2 for CINBR and 6:7 for AMNWR.) Travel for CINBR staff and workshop costs were jointly supported by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the conservation group WWF, which also attended the workshop.

“This sister-refuge relationship is designed to be an informal, working relationship,” says Van Pelt. “The emphasis is on the operational level, not on the ceremonial level.” For examples of progress from the relationship, he points to harmonized methods for surveying seabirds, the possibility of jointly applying for grants, and access that CINBR now has to scientific staff at AMNWR. Research between the sites is underway on sea otters, which are in decline in the western AMNWR but stable in the Commander Islands. “Comparing the populations could help AMNWR understand why sea otters are declining in their management area and help CINBR ensure that sea otters remain stable in theirs,” says Van Pelt.

*continued on next page*

## Table of Contents

“Sister MPAs”: Building International Relationships Between Sites to Share Lessons .....	1
Letter to the Editor .....	3
<i>MPA Perspective:</i> Key Findings on the Sustainability of Integrated Coastal Management Processes .....	4
Notes & News .....	5
<i>MPA Spotlight:</i> Tanzanian MPA Teams Up with Mobile Phone Company to Improve Communications .....	6

## MPA News

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There are some constraints to the extent of collaboration, including the Russian/English language barrier between the sites and a staffing shortage at CINBR, among other challenges. These are being addressed, with plans for translation of documents and potential implementation of low-cost hiring practices involving local temporary or student help.

"This workshop was an ice-breaker between AMNWR and CINBR," says Van Pelt. He would like to see more workshops that maintain the focus on concrete progress in management, and continue teamwork with other institutions active in regional conservation: Audubon Alaska, Pacific Institute of Geography, Russian Bird Conservation Union, UN Development Programme, WWF-Russian Far East, and WWF-US. "The long-term goal is for independent but collaborative and closely coordinated management systems," he says. "When you consider that until fairly recently, CINBR and AMNWR were entirely isolated from each other, it is extraordinary progress to have their managers and staff sitting together for three days, looking for avenues of mutual benefit. We hope this will grow, bringing the management of these neighboring areas closer together and building pathways across the international boundary."

### Tourism lessons: Komodo National Park (Indonesia) and Galápagos Marine Reserve (Ecuador)

Despite the thousands of miles that separate them, Komodo National Park in Indonesia and Ecuador's Galápagos Marine Reserve in the eastern Pacific have much in common. They feature volcanic islands, large endemic reptiles, and reputations as natural laboratories for evolution. Both are UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves. They also share similar management challenges, including overexploitation of marine natural resources, conflicts between fishermen and park authorities, and expanding local populations.

While the similarities are striking, it was a difference between the sites that led officials five years ago to contemplate an exchange of personnel. Namely, Galápagos was benefiting (financially and managerially) from decades of research conducted there on tourism impacts and management, while Komodo — where tourism was largely unregulated — was not. Komodo officials and stakeholders wanted to learn about the Galápagos tourism management system, including its relatively steep US \$100 entrance fee for most foreign adults (Komodo's is \$2), and examine how it could be adapted to make Komodo more sustainable.

In early 2001, an Indonesian team of representatives from Komodo National Park, local government, the private sector, and local communities traveled to Galápagos and met with their counterparts. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an international conservation organization that has supported management

activities at Komodo National Park for several years, organized the trip. Travel was financed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Alex C. Walker Educational and Charitable Trust.

"Tourism management in Galápagos is a great model, in which guides play a pivotal role in informing tourists and monitoring a code of conduct for boat operations and monitoring a code of conduct for boat operations and tourism in the park," says Rili Djohani, who was in the Komodo delegation and is director of TNC's Southeast Asia Center for Marine Protected Areas. Meetings between Indonesian and Ecuadorian personnel explored the Galápagos fee collection system and how its revenues were allocated among various institutions. In Galápagos, 45% of each entrance fee is retained for management of the park; in Komodo, the funds go directly to local and regional government, with little returning to the protected area.

The main output of the meeting — a formal declaration of cooperation among Komodo, Galápagos, and attendees from three other island protected areas in Latin America — committed the parks to sharing technical assistance on management issues. That agreement facilitated a second visit of Indonesian representatives (including media) to Galápagos, as well as two reciprocal trips to Komodo by park and tourism personnel from Galápagos. On the latter visits, Galápagos personnel learned about coral and fish monitoring protocols as well as the zoning plan for Komodo National Park.

Djohani says the exchanges helped build local support in Komodo for a proposed tourism management plan — the Komodo Collaborative Management Initiative, now awaiting approval by the Indonesian government. With a target of making the MPA financially self-sustainable, the plan would involve the park, TNC, a private tourism consulting agency, and a multistakeholder advisory board. The entrance fee for Komodo would be increased, with a greater share directed to park management. Djohani suggests the visits to Galápagos, by bringing together a wide range of local people, got them working toward the same goals. "That experience really bonded us," she says. "The study tours greatly enhanced the spirit of this management initiative."

### Pairing advanced MPAs with less-advanced ones: Caribbean site exchanges

In the Caribbean, the UNEP-Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP-CEP) is facilitating multiple activities to aid lesson-sharing among managers. These include providing "Training of Trainers" courses in all aspects of MPA management, and assisting with the CaMPAM Network and Forum Partnership — an initiative to network Caribbean MPA practitioners (*MPA News* 6:1). Under the framework of these activities and the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), UNEP-CEP has helped support exchanges of personnel between MPAs. A hallmark of

these exchanges has been the careful pairing of advanced sites — those with best practices to teach on a particular subject — with less-advanced ones.

Alessandra Vanzella-Khoury, UNEP-CEP program officer, says that through CaMPAM it has become clear that Caribbean MPAs face common challenges and that communication can help solve them. “Many Caribbean MPAs — while still weak in some ways — have developed best practices in other respects, which can be easily adapted by other MPAs,” she says. She refers to the teacher MPAs as “demonstration sites” and the student MPAs as “target sites”, using terminology developed by ICRAN. She notes that the concept of demonstration sites does not imply a site of excellence, but rather a site with a success story to share and transfer.

Under this arrangement, site pairs are not necessarily viewed as formal “sister MPAs”, although care is given to matching similar sites. To begin, target sites self-identify their most pressing need, and propose a potential site from which to learn. In cases where they do not know of an appropriate partner, UNEP-CEP or CaMPAM members assist in identifying a suitable demonstration site.

An exchange using this framework occurred in 2002, involving the Soufrière Marine Management Area in St. Lucia and Negril Marine Park in Jamaica. (The principal sponsor of the exchange was the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica.) Similar to the above example of Komodo and Galápagos, the exchange focused on an existing user fee system (Soufrière’s) and how it could be adapted to the other park (Negril). In this case, however, the participating personnel were the rangers of each multi-use MPA — the fee collectors under the user fee system.

Project Manager Carl Hanson of the Negril Coral Reef Preservation Society (NCRPS), which operates Negril Marine Park, says the primary goal was for the four participating Negril rangers to gain hands-on, day-to-day field experience with how the Soufrière user fee system worked. “Our rangers were given the opportunity to work full-time for a whole month in the Soufrière program, and reported to work each day as if they were employed as rangers within that MPA,” says Hanson. NCRPS viewed the Soufrière site as a model for how user fees could contribute significantly to operational costs of an MPA, as well as how stakeholders could be involved in participatory resource management. Secondary goals of the exchange included sharing experience with enforcement, monitoring techniques, zoning, and mooring-buoy installation.

The visitation was reciprocal, with three rangers from Soufrière Marine Management Area working at Negril, examining the park’s established monitoring programs for coral reefs and water quality. (Soufrière was considering creating a similar water-quality monitoring program.) Each park was responsible for housing visiting rangers during the exchange.

NCRPS is now getting ready to institute a user fee system for Negril Marine Park, and has increased the number of days with ranger patrols from six to seven in preparation. Following the ranger exchange, says Hanson, management of the park has been more inclusive of stakeholders, with an increase in the number of public meetings — not least to educate locals about the imminent user fee system. “NCRPS has been reminded of the importance of continued dialogue with interest groups that might be affected by these management interventions,” says Hanson. 🌊

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## Letter to the Editor

### Reply to letter on Pew Fellows MPA Statement

#### Dear *MPA News*:

Your July 2005 issue (*MPA News* 7:1) contained a letter from John Clark, who was responding to an earlier article about the Pew Fellows MPA Action Statement, described in your June issue (6:11). In his letter, John Clark wrote in part: “To say that 10-50% of all marine ecosystems should become no-take zones ignores reality. In each part of the sea where protection is necessary, there are areas where no-take is justified within MPA boundaries, and areas where other types of management are more appropriate.”

We completely agree. The Pew Fellows statement (Recommendation 10) reads: “Place *no less than 10% and as much as 50% of each ecosystem* in no-take zones, according to identified needs and management options

in a particular ecosystem.” Note that 10% of an *ecosystem* does not necessarily mean 10% of an *MPA*. No-take MPAs are not always the best answer. We do suggest that MPAs be linked together into networks. Within such a network, a number of individual MPAs might allow some extraction. The 10% minimum no-take area is, we feel, necessary to monitor and assess the effectiveness of an MPA network. The world’s oceans are in free fall, and their problems cannot be reversed or even arrested without significant measures to protect them.

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Editor’s note: Alcalá, Gjerde, and White are Pew Fellows in marine conservation (<http://www.pewmarine.org>).

This essay represents the authors' abridgement of several related research papers that appear in a special issue of the journal *Ocean & Coastal Management*, published July 2005 (Volume 48, pp. 205-483). The papers present the findings of a three-year project to assess the sustainability of integrated coastal management programs in Indonesia and the Philippines. Patrick Christie, an assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Marine Affairs, USA, was project leader. Nicole Milne, Risa Oram, Leila Sievanen, Joel Simonetti, and Monika Thiele were project assistants.

All papers from the special issue of *Ocean & Coastal Management* are available in PDF format at [http://www.sma.washington.edu/Research/ICM\\_pubs/index.html](http://www.sma.washington.edu/Research/ICM_pubs/index.html). The website also provides a link to a workbook on making integrated coastal management more sustainable.

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## MPA Perspective Key Findings on the Sustainability of Integrated Coastal Management Processes

By Patrick Christie, Nicole Milne, Risa Oram, Leila Sievanen, Joel Simonetti, and Monika Thiele  
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The process of integrated coastal management (ICM), which often involves the creation of community-based MPAs, is designed to help make rational decisions on conservation and use of resources in a given area. While definitions vary, ICM consists of a multi-sectoral planning process that balances economic development with environmental management. To ensure the decisions are respected by the community — and are thereby effective over time — ICM usually seeks the active and sustained involvement of stakeholders in decision-making.

ICM has frequently been implemented in a developing nation context: the model attempts to address the complex issues that span fishery declines, pollution, deforestation, and habitat degradation, among other challenges. In Southeast Asia, ICM was introduced two decades ago by foreign institutions, and has been applied through a tremendous expenditure of effort, involving hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid and expertise. In the context of the Philippines and Indonesia — our research project's focal countries — several factors have likely elevated the importance to stakeholders of participatory and conflict-resolution processes, including general cynicism toward government and the high reliance of coastal communities on coastal and marine resources.

In these countries, much has been accomplished through ICM. This includes considerable environmental improvement in locales like Bunaken National Park (Indonesia), and the fact that more than 100 municipalities and cities in the Philippines have adopted some form of ICM — totaling one-sixth of the nation's coastline. Nonetheless, as demonstrated by worsening coral reef conditions and/or declining catch-per-unit-effort in several ICM sites, improvements are not guaranteed.

What makes some ICM projects succeed while others fail? And how can sustainability be assured after foreign aid funds and personnel leave at project's end? Our team examined nine project sites for factors influencing the sustainability of ICM planning processes over time. Among our findings:

- **Early involvement and participation by stakeholders in ICM are influenced by perceptions of initial and future project benefits.** This involvement enhances the likelihood that ultimate benefits will be those desired by the target population. Over time, the improvement of economic and environmental conditions fosters ICM success and sustainability: achievement of benefits

stimulates continuing involvement, thus sustaining the ICM process. Importantly, it takes both community involvement and the achievement of desired benefits to effect ICM sustainability.


- **The links between environmental improvement and motivation to support ICM appear to be strong for self-described environmentalists and coastal-dependent business owners (e.g., dive tourism brokers).** Most coastal inhabitants expect environmental improvement through ICM, particularly via increased and sustained fish yields and the meeting of basic needs. Interestingly, resource user perceptions of environmental conditions do not always correlate with scientific observations from the field, thus suggesting that both should be included in research. Perceptions, while sometimes dismissed as ungrounded and inconsequential, underpin actions by donors, decision makers, and resource users.
- **Management processes are undermined by the absence of robust institutions to ensure equitable distribution of benefits among and within multiple stakeholder groups, including fishing communities and tourism operators.** There should be conflict-resolution mechanisms available to resolve inevitable tensions. Poorly managed conflict can result in further marginalization of resource user groups, cynicism regarding resource management, and, eventually, declining environmental conditions.
- **Institutional and legal frameworks that mandate governance reform are lagging behind the pace of ICM project evolution.** In the Philippines, laws that would encourage sustainable resource use are increasingly adopted and enforced at local levels, but remain underdeveloped at the national level. Some laws and policies developed at the national level have contradicted successful local initiatives. There are few clear incentives for networks of national institutions to adopt ICM as an overarching framework and to collaborate across sector lines. In both countries, the divisions between municipal and national agencies and among various national agencies limit the expansion of ICM across these institutional boundaries.
- **Short project time horizons are not conducive to sustained ICM processes beyond project termination.** The development of a clear direction and effective staff requires approximately 2-3 years. The most recent Philippine ICM project, the Coastal Resource Management Project, "reached its stride" and accomplished a tremendous amount in years 3-7 of an 8-year effort. New ICM projects, even those sponsored by donors with previous ICM-supporting experience, usually focus on new sites. The rationale behind site changes is not always clear.

- While perceived as valuable by national and local leaders and NGOs, ICM will not likely become a government budget line item on par with health, education, and poverty reduction. Experiments in establishing internally generated financing are important examples of sustainability. Diver fee collection systems in both countries have the potential to support protected areas. Management of these financial resources needs to be consistent, efficient, transparent, and equitable.

- The successes of individual ICM efforts can often be traced directly to relatively small groups of committed individuals who have dedicated their careers to this effort. Investment in capacity development in project staffs, local and national agencies and NGOs are resources well-spent. The development of capable staffs and institutional linkages is a slow process requiring years of attention. If ICM program sites are to be changed, the maintenance of a cadre of dedicated ICM

experts from project to project, as in the case of the Coastal Resource Management Project or the Fisheries Improved for Sustainable Harvests project (<http://www.oneocean.org>), is essential. One policy reform worth considering is for donors to make long-term commitments to particular international and national practitioners of ICM in developing countries (similar to the Pew Fellowships for Marine Conservation offered by the Pew Charitable Trusts).

## Conclusions

While conditions worsen at many project sites and ICM is rarely self-sustaining, this does not necessarily indicate the failure of this management model nor suggest that divestment is an appropriate policy response. Rather, it indicates the sporadic commitment to ICM by national and international entities, the challenging contexts, and the potential areas for improvement in project design. Our research demonstrates that participative, rewarding, and just ICM processes, conducted in a supportive legal and institutional context, are capable of improving environmental conditions while maintaining services to society. ICM represents an appropriate middle ground between those advocating mainly for social and economic justice and those primarily concerned with environmental preservation. Now that ICM is part of the coastal management scenario in Indonesia and Philippines, let us learn from and build on this model. 

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## Notes & News

### UNESCO World Heritage adds four marine sites

Four sites with major marine components are among the newest additions to the World Heritage List, overseen by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Added to the list on 14 July 2005, these new World Heritage sites are:

- Coiba National Park (Panama) — possessing extraordinary biodiversity, with 760 species of fishes and 20 cetacean species;
- Geirangerfjord and Noerøysfjord (Norway) — two of the world's longest and deepest fjords;
- Gulf of California (Mexico) — featuring 244 islands, 90 endemic fish species, and a third of the world's total number of cetacean species; and
- Shiretoko Peninsula (Japan) — providing important habitat for several marine mammal species, salmonids, migratory birds, and the highest recorded density of brown bears in the world.

The World Heritage Convention (<http://whc.unesco.org>) seeks to protect the world's most important cultural and natural heritage. In designating more than 800 locales as World Heritage sites — from the Taj Mahal to the Great Barrier Reef — the 180 state parties to the convention have indicated their desire that these places be preserved.

It was also announced in July that the World Heritage Marine Program, which has sought to enhance UNESCO's marine conservation capacity and expand the application of World Heritage across a range of ocean ecosystems (*MPA News* 5:6), has received official status as a thematic program under the convention. It

was formerly an *ad hoc* initiative operated through extrabudgetary funding. Marjaana Kokkonen, a marine heritage specialist with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, says she hopes that within 10-20 years, all marine sites with "outstanding universal value" and the political feasibility of listing will be inscribed on the list. "We first need to identify the potential sites that meet the World Heritage criteria and make sure these sites also meet the integrity requirements," she says. "If they do not — that is, if management is unsatisfactory — we will work with the concerned governments and partner organizations to help improve management and legal protection to the level required."

### For more information

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### Directory available on Mediterranean MPAs

A directory of MPAs in the Mediterranean Sea is available containing information on more than 70 MPAs throughout the region. Published in June 2005 by WWF-France, the directory provides contact information for each site and general site features, including area, principal marine species present, and IUCN management category.

"The main purpose of the publication is to help Mediterranean MPA managers communicate with each other at the regional scale," says consultant Sébastien Mabile. Mabile produced the directory with Catherine

*continued on next page*

### Report: costs, benefits of MPAs for islands

A new report published by WWF-The Netherlands explores costs and benefits of MPAs as they apply to islands, and provides several examples of island nations' experiences with MPAs. The 64-page report *Marine Protected Areas: Benefits and Costs for Islands* recommends that in light of the acute environment-related challenges faced by small island developing states (including climate variability and extreme weather events), such nations should examine the tool of MPAs as a conservative investment that could bear long-term ecological and socioeconomic benefits. The report was co-sponsored by the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), The Nature Conservancy, and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, and is available in PDF format at [http://panda.org/about\\_wwf/what\\_we\\_do/marine/publications/index.cfm](http://panda.org/about_wwf/what_we_do/marine/publications/index.cfm).

## Framework under development for MPA networks

An international guide is being developed to help practitioners and policymakers establish MPA networks at national and regional levels, with a first draft expected to be released for public comment in October 2005. The document — being drafted by a partnership of intergovernmental organizations, national government agencies, and NGOs — will provide a framework for progressing from general networking principles to practical actions, and from single-site MPAs to ecosystem-based network development. The intent is to help establish representative networks of MPAs worldwide by 2012, a goal set by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2004 (*MPA News* 5:9).

Discussions on the framework were the focus of an international workshop held 15-17 July in New Orleans, Louisiana (US). Coordinated by the (US) NOAA International Programs Office in conjunction with multiple partners, the workshop convened experts from 21 countries to share experiences on challenges and best practices associated with MPA networking at ecosystem-relevant scales. For more information on the workshop or the framework document, e-mail Annie Hillary at [Annie.Hillary@noaa.gov](mailto:Annie.Hillary@noaa.gov) or Lynne Mersfelder-Lewis at [Lynne.Mersfelder@noaa.gov](mailto:Lynne.Mersfelder@noaa.gov).

Piante, project manager of MedPAN, an EU-funded initiative to network MPA managers in the Mediterranean. Piante adds, “With this directory, we would like to facilitate relations and exchange of information among MPA managers of different Mediterranean countries, as most of them face similar management issues. We also hope the directory will help develop awareness among Mediterranean MPA managers that they are a community with common objectives.”

MedPAN, active from 1900 to 1996 before running out of funding, resumed activity in January 2005 with the infusion of European Commission support. The project has plans to organize several thematic workshops

on MPA management issues over the next two years, including one in October 2005 in Andalusia (Spain) on MPA management plans. A MedPAN newsletter and website are in the planning stage. The *Global Directory of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean* is available in PDF format at <http://www.wwf.fr/pdf/RepertoireAMP.pdf>.

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## MPA Spotlight: Tanzanian MPA Teams Up with Mobile Phone Company to Improve Communications

Effective management of an MPA, like any institution, depends on being able to communicate effectively. When an MPA is in a remote location, communication can be difficult, both internally among staff and externally between management and stakeholder communities. Preventing or responding to illegal activity, for example, becomes a challenge for managers when they cannot communicate immediately or securely with one another.

To address such communications challenges, the 822-km<sup>2</sup> Mafia Island Marine Park, located offshore of Tanzania in eastern Africa, has forged an innovative relationship with WWF and global telecommunications group Vodafone PLC. In November 2004, Vodacom Tanzania (a company of which Vodafone is a major shareholder) launched mobile phone service on Mafia Island, primarily to support the marine conservation efforts of the surrounding marine park and WWF. In doing so, Vodacom Tanzania effectively “fast-tracked” Mafia Island for mobile phone service: at the time, the island was not among the top 20 locations earmarked for network coverage in Tanzania, due to its relatively small population (40,000) and low business activity.


The launch of Mafia Island phone service is part of a larger, GBP 400,000 (US \$720,000) funding package to WWF from the Vodafone Group Foundation (VGF), initiated in 2003, to support marine conservation activities in the Eastern Africa marine ecoregion, from Somalia to South Africa. (VGF is the philanthropic arm of Vodafone.) Vodafone, which has major holdings in mobile phone companies throughout the region, was interested in exploring ways to provide technological support in parallel to the funding. A technology audit was conducted for Mafia Island, and concluded that strengthened communication capacity was necessary.

The new phone service complements a pre-existing system of 15 VHF radios that had been used to communicate within the park. Jason Rubens of WWF-Tanzania says that although radio communications can be very functional and cost-effective under certain circumstances, they also have serious limitations.

“Most importantly, a radio is a centralized, immobile unit shared by a number of people, ranging from an office or institution to a whole village,” says Rubens. “So compared with personalized phones, making direct contact with particular individuals can be a very indirect process involving leaving messages, arranging to speak later, and so on. This greatly slows down planning and implementation of activities.” Because the VHF network was (and remains) open to everyone, congestion of its limited channels was typically chronic, and it was also difficult to hold secure, confidential communications — a necessary element in planning surveillance and enforcement activities, says Rubens.

“That said,” he adds, “radio communications remain an important part of the marine park’s communications strategy. Despite its limitations, VHF communication with villages in particular is a cost-effective system that is fairly immune to abuse.”

In addition to assisting marine park management with enforcement, monitoring, and other activities, the new phone system benefits the small island community: Mafia Island fishermen use the phones to obtain market, fishing, and weather information, as well as to communicate with the mainland and rest of the world. All mobile phone users in Mafia — whether the marine park or villagers — are subject to the same normal usage charges as any Vodacom customer in Tanzania. VGF Director Mike Caldwell says, “Access to communications plays a vital role in development. This project demonstrates how mobile technology can contribute to the marine conservation efforts of Mafia’s marine park and the work of WWF, and also help change and improve the lives of local people.”

(This article was inspired by an initial report of the phone service partnership in *WIO-MPA Newsletter*, the newsletter of Western Indian Ocean MPAs.) 

### For more information

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