

MPA News Poll: The Coming Challenges for MPAs, and How to Address Them

This month's First International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC1), to be held 23-28 October in Geelong, Australia, is one of the first global conferences devoted solely to the subject of MPAs. Hopefully many more will follow. Unanswered questions still abound on aspects of MPA science (e.g. the effects of reserves on neighboring fisheries) and on best practices in planning and management. The more opportunities that exist for researchers and practitioners worldwide to share their knowledge, the sooner we will grasp the strengths and weaknesses of MPAs as management tools.

As we work toward this understanding, individual sites and the MPA field as a whole will continue to face challenges related to planning, management, science, monitoring, politics, and other aspects. In this light, *MPA News* this month asked several forward-thinking practitioners and researchers a question:

"What will be the greatest challenge facing the field of MPAs over the next decade, and how would you like to see this challenge addressed?"

Their responses offer readers a slate of issues to consider:

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The greatest challenge facing the field of MPAs historically, now, and into the future is human nature and how to overcome its destructive attributes. The worst attributes seem to be:

1. In users of the sea — selfishness and the ability to deny reality for the sake of immediate gain; and
2. In decision-makers and managers — the tendency to exclude the users of the sea from the very first stages of planning and management, and sometimes subsequently.

These deficiencies (which, on the evidence of their ubiquity, are probably imprinted genetically) must be widely recognized, and measures must be taken to overcome their expression and their destructive results. If this is not done, it seems unlikely that action will be taken in time to achieve a global, representative system of MPAs that is sufficiently robust to "maintain

essential ecological processes and life support systems; preserve genetic diversity; and ensure the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems." (IUCN *Guidelines for Marine Protected Areas*)

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There will be many equal challenges, but a critical one is that MPAs, planners, governments, and society must look "outside the box". While MPAs are one of the best tools we currently have for management, this is essentially because they represent a very non-subtle ownership trump card (that is, the "owner" of the location — a government agency or indigenous community, for example — is able to exclude others from using it). Much more difficult will be to improve management of waters outside of MPAs, where ownership is loose or multi-dimensional, issues are larger, and more subtle means of problem identification, resolution, and negotiation will be needed. What happens in these areas, which are by far the major part of coastal and open ocean waters, will make or break the efficacy of what is done within MPAs. The concepts of coastal zone management and "downstream impacts", where downstream means a large and diffuse three-dimensional volume of shifting waters, will need to evolve to facilitate better management.

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In the developing world, the greatest challenge to MPAs is undoubtedly how to achieve and sustain effective on-site management that stops rampant overexploitation so typical for paper parks. This requires a change of paradigms in the international conservation community. MPAs need to be seen from an economic and resource-use perspective that acknowledges perverse incentives at work in present institutional arrangements. While consuming impressive (often aid) resources, inefficient state parks frequently fail to involve local resource users from the formal and "informal" private sector — mostly fisheries and tourism. (In much of

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Africa, the distinction between “local community” and “private sector” in fisheries is muddled; fishing is often for more than just subsistence, and much of the fish trade goes underground to avoid taxation or other governmental pressures.)

Conservation organizations and donors must broaden their policies and overcome their alliance with monopolistic state bureaucracies and bogus government- or donor-created unrepresentative local NGOs. The tragedy is that these institutions all have an unintended but nevertheless common denominator: lack of accountability to resource users on the ground. To talk about local communities as partners in conservation and exclude the private sector is hunting a chimera.

For terrestrial parks, as a direct response to poor performance of the State, private conservation is growing fast. Southern Africa alone has more than 10,000 private game ranches, privately managed nature reserves, and conservancies. While not always a panacea, many are profitable, while effectively conserving nature and biodiversity and directly benefiting local communities. Their success needs to be acknowledged and replicated for marine conservation, where the tragedy of the commons is nearly universal, and property rights and security of tenure particularly undeveloped.

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The challenges may differ from one region to another depending on the socioeconomic status of each region, the dependency of development on exploitation of marine resources, and the level of environmental awareness of active sectors, especially regarding sustainable and integrated development of the coastal and marine environment.

In the Arabian Gulf region, the greatest challenges facing the field of MPAs in the next decade are:

1. Empowering institutional capacity to solve user conflicts inside MPAs in a manner consistent with the goals and objectives of these MPAs. In addition, privately protected islands in the region (often used as captive breeding centers for threatened species of interest) should be considered as part of the regional network of MPAs, and managed according to international standards of MPA management.
2. Ensuring funding for operations, surveillance, and monitoring. This challenge requires political and financial persuasion as well as governmental support.
3. Addressing transboundary issues that affect MPAs, and placing them on the agenda of regional meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine

Environment (ROPME). Hopefully, this will lead to more efficient cooperation in the field of marine environmental protection in general and MPAs in particular.

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The biggest challenge will be bringing order out of the burgeoning number of case histories that are accumulating. We have largely emerged from the “polarized period” when discussion of MPAs was too often a non-dialogue between believers (who often verged on the fanatic in their enthusiasm) and non-believers (who had a comparable share of fanaticism in their denial).

Recently, discussion tends to focus more constructively on objectives and consequences of new MPAs. These discussions should be informed by lessons learned from experiences already gained with MPAs. However, we are stuck with a legacy of past overzealous claims about benefits and entrenched criticisms by skeptics. This is a dangerous situation when there are so many case histories accumulating. Partisans from both camps can cherry-pick their way, assembling advocacy cases that MPAs either (A) achieve great things and don't have the shortcomings claimed by their critics, or (B) fail to deliver on promised benefits and bring negative side-effects. Such “advocacy science” needs to be countered effectively if we are to have our understanding of the benefits and costs of MPAs reach maturity, and provide a basis for the effective use of this important tool in conservation and management. It can only be countered by comprehensive and objective evaluation of our experiences with MPAs.

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MPAs in the Mediterranean are testimony to the failure to avoid negative human impact on the sea: since we have been unable to manage ourselves and our activities, we have at least set aside small portions of the sea where the challenges of conserving habitats and species can be more easily (if not always effectively) addressed. If humans were able to manage their activities at sea in such a way as to use marine resources sustainably everywhere — and avoid dumping large amounts of noxious waste, destroying habitats, and impoverishing biodiversity — then the need for large, multiple-use MPAs that we now have in the Mediterranean would become questionable.

MPAs are badly needed at the moment in the region, and the greatest effort should be devoted to strengthening them through the organization of a regional system of networks. However, while we strive to refine MPAs

during the next decade to conserve marine habitats and species in increasingly sophisticated and effective ways, our main challenge should be to remember that MPAs as a tool for managing human activities at sea should, ultimately, become superfluous. Reaching this awareness will require a considerable change in our current perspectives. In this process, the existing MPAs can serve as a powerful real-world demonstration that coexistence of a healthy marine environment with human economies is possible.

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The main challenge facing MPAs is to make the concept redundant as soon as possible. As marine planning and policy advances, the idea that only some areas of the sea will be protected (which really means the intelligent regulation of human activities) will soon be seen as inadequate and, finally, as absurd. This advance could occur by an extension of terrestrial planning systems, which focus on people and their existing activities. An alternative exists, although at present it is only vaguely described in words like ecosystem management and holistic planning. The sea is very different from land and humans cannot occupy it in any permanent sense. This difference could allow marine planning to focus on the future. It could aim at maintaining the natural processes that make the planet a fit place for us to live, by curtailing our activities where these are wasteful or damaging. The first step toward this would be the widespread establishment of highly protected marine reserves, the only permanently valid form of marine protected areas.

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Marine protected areas dramatically reflect the problem of conserving ecosystems. Unlike terrestrial protected areas, MPAs are open to inputs from land and sea and have no hard boundaries within which to operate. They currently have more symbolic value than actual management value in terms of ensuring the conservation of ecosystems and the cultures that rely on them. The challenge for the next decade is to turn that around. To rise to this challenge, we must alter not only how MPAs are managed, but how we manage ourselves.


This is where MPAs have a special role to play: to fundamentally affect the ethics, behavior, and values of humans. Because there is intrinsic value in the relationship of humans to the sea, MPAs as real places can be leaders of behavioral change — inspiring society to place a higher value on the biota, beauty, and important services that healthy coasts and oceans provide us. The challenge is for those who manage, fund, and support MPAs to understand clearly that these sites are a means

to an end (i.e., education and behavioral change), and cannot be sustained unless that end is achieved. This will require doing all the basics well — i.e., the management plan, monitoring program, enforcement, etc. — without losing sight of the endgame.

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The desire for quick fixes has led to a proliferation of MPAs — many in areas where they are not needed, executed in a way that does not address the threats at hand, and planned with little consideration of long-term financial and social feasibility. This constitutes misuse of the MPA tool for a number of reasons: it initially gives decision-makers and their constituents a false sense of security that something has been done to slow marine degradation, and it can eventually make the public lose confidence in MPAs when it realizes that these MPAs confer little protection.

Even well-planned and executed MPAs are difficult undertakings, because we often expect too much of them. Those with long experience in protected areas recognize that individual MPAs can do only so much in terms of abating fisheries over-exploitation, protecting biodiversity, and safeguarding important ecosystem services. Thus we need to push for MPA networks — strategically designed to protect what is ecologically most critical and most threatened, while freeing up large areas of the coastal seas for regulated sustainable use. But implementing networks is a notoriously challenging process, not least because the timeframes needed are beyond most planning horizons of decision-makers, government agencies, and other institutions.

Overcoming society's need for instant gratification is no mean feat, and not something the marine community can do alone. But if we are courageous and institute a few examples that show how such networks confer substantial long-term benefits, leaders with foresight and the public interest in mind will pick up the gauntlet. 

Correction

Due to an editorial error, the September 2005 issue of *MPA News* misreported the dates of the upcoming Ninth Virgin Islands Nonpoint Source Pollution Conference, to be held in St. John, US Virgin Islands. The correct dates are 28-30 November 2005. *MPA News* apologizes for the error. The conference website is <http://usvircd.org/NPS/NPSCFP2005.htm>.

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Editor's note

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Readers interested in learning more about experiences in implementing this approach are urged to contact the authors directly.

MPA Perspective Conservation Incentive Agreements As a Tool for Developing and Managing MPAs

By Eduard Niesten, Richard Rice, and Mark Erdmann, Conservation International

One of the most common challenges in setting up and managing MPAs throughout the world is the difficulty of “competing” against fisheries and other marine resource sectors that offer the prospect of tangible economic benefits such as employment and revenues to both governments and local stakeholders. Though the medium and long-term benefits of MPAs to sustainable fisheries and marine tourism are increasingly well-known, it can be difficult to sell this long-term view to cash-strapped governments or subsistence fishers in the face of short-term gains offered by commercial interests. One potential solution to this dilemma involves an approach known as “conservation incentive agreements” — a strikingly simple idea which immediately and tangibly benefits key stakeholders by providing continuous, long-term financial or material incentives to conserve marine resources rather than exploit them for short-term gain. Although certainly not universally applicable, this approach has scored several important successes in terrestrial conservation, and is now actively being applied to the marine realm. Below we examine the key features of this approach and how it may be used in an MPA setting.

The fundamental premise underlying incentive agreements is that if properly structured, conservation can compete on a level playing field with much of the destructive exploitation that is commonplace today. A conservation incentive agreement seeks to secure conservation services in a well-defined area of land or sea in exchange for a negotiated package of sustained benefits. The approach avoids some of the pitfalls of indirect approaches to conservation in which there is no formal conservation agreement with local beneficiaries and where success requires the creation of self-sustaining markets for non-destructive activities, often in extremely remote locations. Given its flexibility, the approach allows benefits to be tailored precisely to a given situation. Examples of benefits in ongoing initiatives include funding for school fees in a project in the Solomon Islands and financial support for protecting an indigenous territory in Ecuador.

A defining feature of the model is that continued provision of benefits depends on compliance, as verified using measurable conservation performance indicators. Thus, the approach resembles conservation easements and other incentive mechanisms that are common in industrialized nations, but whose potential remains largely untapped in the developing countries that house much of the world's remaining biodiversity.

Conservation International (CI) first used this approach after observing logging companies acquire the lease


rights to large areas of forest in Guyana at very low cost, suggesting that conservation organizations might well do the same without intending to log. In 2002 the Government of Guyana granted CI a renewable, 30-year lease to manage 80,000 ha of forest for conservation. Under this agreement, CI is paying the government exactly what they would have received had the area been logged.

Since then, similar initiatives have been launched in a wide range of settings around the world, from agreements with governments involving remote lowland rainforests to agreements with traditional Indian communities in the high Andes — and, increasingly, agreements involving marine conservation as well. The tool has proven particularly useful in situations where local communities are the legal resource owners — as is true, for example, in most marine settings in Melanesia. (In industrialized nations, incentive-based approaches have been applied mostly in terrestrial settings — where resource ownership is predominantly private — as opposed to marine settings where resources are typically under government ownership. However, opportunities do exist in the marine realm: agreements can conceivably be made with government authorities or with groups of resource users, such as providing long-term compensation to fishermen for retiring their licenses.)

One concrete example of a marine application in developing countries is in the Arnavon Islands group within the Solomon Islands, where local communities recognized the impact of over-harvesting sea cucumbers, sea turtles, and other marine resources and designated an 8,558-ha marine and terrestrial area as a Provincial wildlife reserve. In exchange, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) provides training and salaries to local community members who patrol the area and monitor sea turtle nesting and foraging sites. Annual onsite project costs are less than US\$25,000. TNC and CI are working to establish a US\$500,000 endowment to guarantee long-term financing for this project and ensure that incentives, including employment and training, continue to flow to local communities — contingent of course upon measurable compliance with the area's protection plan.

Given some general enabling conditions, conservation incentive agreements can be applied in a wide variety of contexts. Important conditions include the ability of resource owners and users to act as a viable counterpart in an agreement, and on-the-ground capacity to effectively manage stakeholder issues, both of which can be developed with appropriate investments if necessary. Effective agreements also require a firm legal basis, which can range from private contracts to public leases. Similarly, a robust long-term agreement depends on sufficient funding to guarantee a stable flow of benefits.

Project-specific endowments offer the most secure guarantee for such funding, but can present a considerable challenge for fundraising. Fortunately, as the potential of this approach is becoming more widely recognized, we are finding that donors are increasingly

interested in providing the necessary long-term support. Though no substitute for more traditional approaches, incentive agreements offer a flexible complement that could greatly extend our ability to achieve conservation objectives in marine settings. 

MPA Spotlight The Tropical Eastern Pacific Corridor: Efforts to Protect Multinational Area Face Opposition from Tuna Fleet

In April 2004, government authorities from Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama signed a declaration to work together to protect the Tropical Eastern Pacific Corridor. This marine area, spanning 2-million km² and including portions of the Exclusive Economic Zones of each of the signatories, would serve as a model for the protection of broad, international, ecologically connected areas. Providing cornerstones for the protection plan would be five existing island national parks and surrounding marine reserves: Galápagos (Ecuador), Coiba (Panama), Cocos Island (Costa Rica), and Malpelo and Gorgona (both of Colombia).

Now underway, the initiative is based on the following concept: that an ecosystem-based approach is necessary to protect the region's wide-ranging species (tunas, turtles, marine mammals), and that such an approach can be carried out in part by coordinating relevant management among existing MPAs in the region. In practice, the initiative's scale and international component have brought challenges. While progress has been made in the past year and a half — including initiation of regional efforts involving authorities, stakeholders, and NGOs — the initiative has also faced strong opposition, namely from the Ecuadorian tuna fleet, which relies largely on the corridor region for much of its catch and is cautious that the initiative could eventually bring restrictions.

Ultimate goal of the initiative

The ultimate goal of the marine corridor initiative, or CMAR for short (for *Corredor Marino*), remains a point of contention. The fishing sector fears the goal is to designate a "super-MPA" that includes the five existing sites and waters in-between. Advocates of the initiative, citing the declarations and documents signed by government officials to this point, argue the objective is simply to improve coordination of management at the existing sites and strengthen mechanisms that provide for effective conservation of protected areas and sustainable use of marine resources.

As it stands, the main challenge for advocates is to convince the industrial fishing sector that CMAR does not propose the creation of a giant no-take area. Opposition to the initiative from the politically influential Ecuadorian tuna fleet has resulted in the Ecuadorian government backing off from actively

promoting the initiative, although it is still officially committed to CMAR under the declaration. "The CMAR initiative supports the sustainable use of the corridor, which is in the long-term interest of the fishing sector," says Gabriel Labbate, coordinator of the UN Environment Programme's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean. His office will supervise dissemination of pending Global Environment Facility funds to support the CMAR initiative. "The creation of any MPA as part of this initiative will have to take into account the needs of the fishing sector," he says.

Scott Henderson, Galápagos program coordinator for Conservation International (CI), an NGO that has actively supported the CMAR initiative, says the project recognizes that tuna fishing is an important regional economic activity. He notes that there are established bodies — primarily the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission — that have the remit to ensure sustainable use. "The aim of the project is to support such bodies so that sustainable fishing can prosper," says Henderson, noting that best environmental practices by the fishing sector can ensure access to conscientious markets. "[CMAR aims] to improve management at established MPAs, not to exclude industrial fishing in the entire region."

Labbate of UNEP adds that another challenge for the project includes the existence of a portion of the corridor outside national waters on the high seas. This portion is being used by fleets from nations that are not signatories to the declaration, including Japan and South Korea. "Involvement of these fleets in the initiative is a real challenge, as they have no formal commitments to it," says Labbate.

The declaration in April 2004 established a rotating secretariat (the initial period is under the umbrella of Costa Rica's environment ministry) to oversee the initiative and coordinate the countries' work plans. Labbate says the main accomplishment so far has been the fact that this institutional space now exists for discussion of sustainable management among nations. "It has helped to strengthen the commitments of future administrations of participating countries to the CMAR," he says. "It has also been relatively successful in bringing funds to sustain this initiative."

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International NGOs and intergovernmental organizations have teamed up to assist. Among them are CI and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, which are cooperating on a UN Foundation and Global Conservation Fund-financed project to promote long-term management and conservation of the five MPAs. (Three of the parks are already World Heritage sites — Galápagos, Coiba, and Cocos Island — while Gorgona and Malpelo have been proposed for such status.) The project involves fostering the networking of managers, scientists, and other professionals associated with these sites: i.e., establishing a communications network for site managers and conservation professionals in the region; providing training on the use of environmental laws and conventions; promoting collaboration among regional conservation organizations on key issues; and supporting the World Heritage nominations for Gorgona and Malpelo. CI and the World Heritage Centre have secured US\$10 million to support these programs over the next four years. The US National Marine Sanctuaries Program is also engaged in capacity-building efforts for MPA managers in the region. And there has been interest expressed in creating an internet listserv for managers and a manager-training program similar to those of the UNEP-sponsored CaMPAM Network and

Forum Partnership — an initiative to network Caribbean MPA practitioners (*MPA News* 6:1).

Marjaana Kokkonen, a marine heritage specialist with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, says that although the idea of designating the entire corridor as a World Heritage site has been suggested, it is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future due to the fishing-sector opposition and other obstacles. But the management of the existing sites can be improved, she says. “We should aim first to conserve the existing sites properly — and there are several problems — before aiming to nominate the whole region,” she says. “For now, we can work to build the necessary collaboration so that perhaps such a designation could happen one day.” 

Newsletter available on cultural, historic MPAs

Managers of MPAs with cultural or historic features face some unique challenges, not least of which is protecting such features from natural deterioration processes. A resource is available to help these practitioners stay up-to-date on the evolving science of underwater archeology and the management of maritime heritage sites. The *Marine Cultural and Historic Newsletter*, published monthly by the US National Marine Protected Areas Center, provides news and information on advances in research and management, with links to where readers may find more information. Although much of the newsletter's focus is on US-based work, each issue also includes news on international developments. Says Editor Brian Jordan, “We hope to promote collaboration among individuals and agencies for the preservation of cultural and historic resources for future generations.” All issues of the newsletter are available at http://mpa.gov/information_tools/newsletters.html. To subscribe to the newsletter, send a message to Brian.Jordan@noaa.gov with “subscribe MCH newsletter” in the subject field.

Notes & News

Report describes fishery restrictions in Caribbean

A new report from the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) in collaboration with the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas documents all areas of the Wider Caribbean region in which fishing is restricted, including MPAs. Initiated to inform managers, scientists, and policymakers on the status of regional fisheries management, the report provides data on no-take and no-entry areas, catch-and-release rules, gear bans, and other management interventions for each country, and also describes the species these measures are intended to protect. The data were gathered via surveys of fisheries and MPA managers. The report *Fishery Regulations in the Wider Caribbean: Project Summary* is online in PDF format at <http://gipping.unep-wcmc.org/wdbpa/caribPa/lang.cfm>. Funding for the project was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the (US) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the United Nations Foundation. An Asia-Pacific version of the project is under development, also by UNEP-WCMC, and should be available next year.

For more information

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Website: MPAs in Puerto Rico, Wider Caribbean

A new website serves as a clearinghouse of information on planning and management of MPAs in Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean region. The site, *Áreas Marinas Protegidas de Puerto Rico y el Gran Caribe* (*Marine Protected Areas in Puerto Rico and the Wider Caribbean*), provides links to relevant sources of information in fisheries management, fisheries biology, ecology, anthropology, sociology, and economics. New

links are accompanied by brief descriptions in Spanish, with some translated to English. The site is managed by the Interdisciplinary Center for Coastal Studies of the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez, and the web address is <http://www.amp-pr.org/blog>.

Hawai'i designates refuge in state waters of Northwestern Hawaiian Islands

In September, the state of Hawai'i (US) designated a 2645-km² no-take marine reserve in all state waters of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), an archipelago that stretches westward from the main Hawaiian Islands for more than 1200 miles (roughly 2000 km). All fishing and other extractive activities are off-limits in the new NWHI State Marine Refuge, except for traditional practices of Native Hawaiians, which could include limited harvest.

In an announcement that accompanied designation of the site, state officials called on the federal government to institute equivalent no-take protection for federal waters of the NWHI, which are undergoing a separate management review process. These federal waters, designated in 2000 by former President Bill Clinton as the 340,000-km² NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, contain several no-take zones but allow fishing elsewhere by a small number of commercial bottomfishing vessels (*MPA News* 6:11). The NWHI bottomfish fishery, valued at US\$1.5 million annually, is almost exclusively in federal waters. Should the recommendation to close the federal waters be followed, state officials propose that the federal government and/or private conservation interests purchase the fishery permits of the vessels at fair market value to help ease the industry's transition to the restrictions.

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