

## New Project to Strengthen the World Database on Protected Areas: What MPA Practitioners Can Expect

According to a goal set by global leaders at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, a worldwide network of marine protected areas is supposed to be in place four years from now (*MPA News* 4:3). Termed the “2012 target”, this goal is one of several established for the MPA community to meet in coming years. Measuring how effectively the world is meeting these objectives requires data. With information on the size, boundaries, and management of individual MPAs worldwide, we can examine where gaps in protection lie and what work still remains.

The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), managed by the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) in conjunction with IUCN, collects and houses such data. For over 20 years, the WDPA has served as the only global dataset on protected areas, both terrestrial and marine. When you read, for example, that less than 1% of the world’s oceans are included in MPAs, that statistic was generated from the WDPA.

Improving the quality and quantity of the WDPA’s marine data is the focus of a new multi-year program at UNEP-WCMC. By closing various gaps in the dataset, the program will allow the WDPA to provide greater assistance to MPA planning, to analyzing progress toward conservation goals, and to informing policy decisions.

The WDPA’s existing dataset benefits from the contributions of national agencies, NGOs, and MPA practitioners. The data also benefit from targeted projects such as MPA Global, a marine-specific database that originated from the WDPA and has been dedicated to improving MPA data that are incomplete or missing (“Project Underway to Build Global MPA Database”, *MPA News* 6:8).

Reintegration of data from the MPA Global database is a major part of the program to strengthen the WDPA. Louisa Wood of the Sea Around Us Project at the University of British Columbia (Canada) developed MPA Global, a collaboration with UNEP-WCMC, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas-Marine, and World Wildlife Fund. Her intent with the project was to ensure development of a globally consistent and robust baseline of MPA data. When Wood originally examined the WDPA marine data, she found that many

sites lacked dates of designation and other basic information. “Along the same line, the ability to store important marine-relevant information was absent from the WDPA,” she says. As an example of absent data, she cites “marine area” — an important data point since many protected areas include both terrestrial and marine components.

“These fundamental data gaps and inconsistencies made it difficult to include the complete global dataset in even relatively simple monitoring assessments,” says Wood, a recent Ph.D. graduate in Geography. “This functional requirement of the database has become particularly apparent in recent years due to the adoption of various targets for the development of MPAs and MPA networks. As these targets were part of the rationale for my Ph.D. project, I was focused from the outset on ensuring the dataset would allow for analyses of global progress. I developed and applied critical minimum data requirements for adding a site to the database: name, designation type, designation status, designation date, total area, marine area, latitude/longitude.”

To address these elements, the MPA component of the WDPA is benefiting from overall improvements to the database and a renewed focus on marine and coastal data compilation, access, and dissemination. Data from other relevant databases will be linked to it, such as those containing information on species, important bird or biodiversity areas, and MPA management effectiveness.

Colleen Corrigan of UNEP-WCMC, who is managing the integration project, says efforts to improve data through shorter-term arrangements such as MPA Global are beneficial and welcomed. “Because UNEP-WCMC has a global mandate to maintain protected areas information, our long-term vision is to bring all marine data together for easy, quick, and cost-effective access by the global community,” says Corrigan. The intent is also to provide MPA analyses and other services, she says, including connections to other useful data and assessments. “This integration project aims to centralize the management and dissemination of global marine data. The resulting breadth of knowledge will inform practitioners and policy-makers alike regarding status of protected areas, and will serve to guide future conservation actions.”

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## Significance for MPA practitioners

The significance of this integration project for practitioners is twofold, says Corrigan. "Because the WDPA is undergoing substantial improvements to allow for direct uploads and downloads by registered users," she says, "it will increase the engagement of the greater marine conservation community in contributing to the expansion and improvement of MPA data. Second, it will benefit this community through increased access to updated and improved MPA data needed for analysis, reporting, and planning. Through this collaboration, we expect to have a more robust, accurate, and functional protected areas database."

With the new WDPA, users will be able to search for marine protected area information by country, site name, or international convention. The improved database will allow users to visualize protected areas using global, regional, national, or site-specific geographic references. For example, says Corrigan, users will be able to scan a three-dimensional globe and select countries or sites of interest to reveal MPA data and boundaries, informed by satellite imagery. Data will be freely accessible to everyone, and users with GIS skills will be able to download shapefiles with full metadata for analysis or integration with other maps. Lucy Fish, WDPA database manager, says, "The new system will allow for people to tailor the delivery of the information for their own needs and it will provide regular updates online."

Corrigan says the quality of information achieved by MPA Global will be upheld as part of its full incorporation back into WDPA. "A total of 20 attributes about MPAs will be maintained in the new version of the WDPA," she says. "MPA practitioners will have the opportunity to upload the best available information and shapefiles relevant to their MPAs, including details on management zones. In addition, they can provide edits to existing data records and download shapefiles for use on their own computer networks." Corrigan notes that with more than 4000 MPAs currently in the database, the participation of MPA managers and agencies will be needed to ensure that information on all existing MPAs is uploaded and as accurate as possible.

Ensuring access and accuracy will be the key. MPA Global created a registration system for people who wanted to upload or revise data. This helped manage the quality of additions and revisions, while also allowing the project to acknowledge the contributions of participants. The strengthened WDPA will do the same, while also featuring an expert review process to monitor data quality. In addition, the WDPA will integrate MPA Global's operationalization of the IUCN definition for "marine protected area", which used specific criteria to assess which sites should count as MPAs and thus be included in the database. "This process has contributed to the development of a more transparent and explicit methodology for monitoring MPAs," says Wood. The basic premise of a solid database, she says, is "simply getting reliable, consistent, and globally comprehensive basic data because it has been so incredibly hard to get. Even now, in some places there are still serious gaps and challenges in filling them."

The continued help and participation of MPA planners and managers will be necessary to ensure that a broad array of marine site data is provided and improvements continue to be made. The challenge of collecting and maintaining data on MPAs is a substantial one that could not be achieved without the assistance and dedication of agencies, funders, and individuals worldwide who have collaborated to update MPA data in both MPA Global and the WDPA. 

## For more information

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home.html

## Forthcoming paper on global progress toward MPA targets

The journal *Oryx* will soon feature an assessment of progress made toward international MPA goals. It is based on updated data from the MPA Global database, which was originally developed from the World Database on Protected Areas. The paper "Assessing progress towards global marine protection targets: shortfalls in information and action" is co-authored by Louisa Wood, Lucy Fish, Josh Laughren, and Daniel Pauly.

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## Notes & News

### Uganda designates first aquatic reserve

In November 2007, Uganda designated a reserve in Lake Victoria with the goal of protecting and restoring populations of Nile perch and other fish stocks. Commercial fishing is now banned inside the 100-km<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth Lake Reserve, while recreational fishing is permitted under strict conditions. The

protected area took effect in December and is Uganda's first aquatic reserve. The largest lake in Africa, Lake Victoria is subject to territorial administration by Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. More details on the new reserve are available at [www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/599178](http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/599178).

## Time to Renew Efforts for Coral Reef MPAs

By Sue Wells

The International Year of the Reef (IYOR) 2008 has been designated by the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and its members to promote conservation action and strengthen long-term constituencies for coral reef conservation. Building on the lessons learned from IYOR 1997, it provides an opportunity to highlight the extreme urgency of tackling the problems facing the world's declining coral reefs — now clearly one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Despite the many initiatives underway to protect them, the health of many reefs continues to deteriorate.

IYOR 2008 provides an opportunity to see how we can use MPAs more effectively to protect reefs. MPAs have long been a central tool for reef conservation — both for the maintenance of healthy reefs and for providing the conditions for recovery of those that are damaged. Some of the earliest MPAs were set up to protect reefs, such as the “Sea Gardens” off Nassau initially protected in the Bahamas in the 1890s, and the many *tabu* areas in the Pacific, now centuries old. The evidence for the role of no-take MPAs in maintaining and increasing populations of reef fish and other species within their boundaries is now undisputed.

About 1100 protected areas have coral reefs (source: World Database on Protected Areas, September 2006), or about 25% of the world's MPAs, and an estimated 15-22% of the area of the world's reef lies within MPAs. This means that, unlike other marine and many terrestrial ecosystems, the target of 10% set by the Convention on Biological Diversity has globally been reached. But for ecosystems such as reefs, where the total area is small and the decline precipitous, a much greater level of protection is needed. Furthermore, it seems that MPAs provide no guarantee that the reefs within them will be in good health: in many cases reefs have deteriorated as much inside MPAs as outside. And ironically, the increase in number of MPAs over the last two decades actually correlates with the rate of decline in healthy coral.

Can we reverse this trend during IYOR 2008? There are three key issues that perhaps need particular attention:

### 1. Increasing the area of protected reefs within MPA networks

Many countries are now starting to design networks of MPAs to improve representation of all habitat types, often with targets for reef protection set higher than 10%. For example, in their national protected area system plans, Belize has a target of 30% of its coral reefs

to be protected and Cuba has a target of 25%. Other countries could follow these leads.

### 2. Ensuring that MPA networks address reef resilience and connectivity

Guidelines published by The Nature Conservancy ([www.reefresilience.org](http://www.reefresilience.org)) describe how reefs that are more resistant and resilient (i.e. that are able to withstand, and recover from, stresses such as bleaching) can be identified and then incorporated into MPA networks. The general principles that have been developed are being tested in the design of new MPA networks in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Belize, but there is scope for using them more widely.

In relation to connectivity, research is showing that the larvae of many species disperse over much shorter distances than previously thought, often staying on their reefs of origin or recruiting to adjacent reefs. For example, in the Bahamas, distinct genetic differences have been found between populations of *Acropora palmata* on reefs as close as 2-20 km, and all populations more than 500 km apart are distinct. This information will be used by the Bahamas as it develops its planned network of no-take marine reserves. Further work of this nature is needed.

### 3. Improving management of coral reef MPAs

It is not possible to list all the interventions needed to improve MPA management, but the following could be given particular attention during IYOR 2008:

- More and larger reef no-take areas: only about 1.4% of reefs lie within no-take areas, and possibly less than 0.1% of reefs are within MPAs that fully protect diversity;
- Greater compliance with regulations designed to protect reefs and their inhabitants, so that poaching, destructive fishing methods, anchoring, ship groundings and other such activities are eliminated;
- Improvements in MPA infrastructure and equipment, provision of adequate resources, and capacity building of MPA personnel at all levels;

*continued on next page*

### Editor's note

Sue Wells is a private consultant. She co-authored the landmark IUCN report *A Global Representative System of Marine Protected Areas*, and is lead editor of *Reef Encounter*, the newsletter of the International Society for Reef Studies.

### Reflections on the previous International Year of the Reef — 1997

The year 2008 is not the first International Year of the Reef; 1997 was similarly designated. An article in the September 2007 edition of *Reef Encounter*, the newsletter of the International Society for Reef Studies, provides a record of what happened in IYOR eleven years ago. The article “Reflections on progress since IYOR 1997” is on pp. 13-14 of the issue, available at [www.iyor.org/news/pdf/Reef\\_Encounter\\_35\\_September\\_2007.pdf](http://www.iyor.org/news/pdf/Reef_Encounter_35_September_2007.pdf).

## For more information

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- Introduction of regular evaluations of management effectiveness, with feedback to improve performance.

Of course, MPAs alone will not ensure the survival of the world's reefs, given their vulnerability to bleaching, ocean acidification, nutrient enrichment, land-based pollution and run-off, and other factors emanating from well beyond the boundaries. Many other activities and interventions are needed, as indicated on the IYOR 2008 website. There is little direct funding for IYOR

2008 and, as with IYOR 1997, the approach will be to inspire organizations and individuals to use the initiative as an umbrella for existing and new events/activities. Everyone is encouraged to participate. An online calendar allows IYOR participants to post their activities.

For additional news and information about IYOR, visit [www.iyor.org](http://www.iyor.org) or e-mail the IYOR International Coordinator at [info@iyor.org](mailto:info@iyor.org). 

## What MPA managers can do as part of IYOR 2008

Several key interventions that will help MPAs to protect reefs are given in the article above. There are also many individual activities that could be undertaken during IYOR 2008 and that would ensure that individual MPAs make their contribution:

1. Organize an exhibition or educational display about coral reefs in the MPA visitor or information center
2. Organize talks, guided visits, reef clean-ups, competitions, or other events to celebrate IYOR 2008
3. Hold a fundraising event for a specific reef conservation action

4. Launch an "Adopt-a-Reef" campaign or similar initiative to raise funds and increase awareness of reefs
5. For MPAs outside the tropics, consider "twinning" with a coral reef MPA, and helping to raise funds for its management
6. Invite the local media and key reef stakeholders and users (tourist operators, hoteliers, etc.) to the MPA for an "IYOR 2008 Day" to identify issues and solutions
7. Advertise IYOR 2008 within the MPA, in promotional materials and on websites

— By Sue Wells

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## MPA Spotlight: Profiling the Debate Over Reopening Tsitsikamma National Park to Fishing

In South Africa in 2006-2007, a debate was waged over whether to reopen part of Tsitsikamma National Park to fishing. Designated in 1964, the park is among the oldest MPAs in Africa and has been fully no-take since 2000. The nation's Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) proposed last year that roughly one-tenth of the park be reopened to line-fishing by members of local communities on a controlled and monitored basis. The proposal was contested by biologists and conservationists who said reopening the protected area would be a step backward for marine conservation.

Below, *MPA News* summarizes the cases that were made for and against reopening Tsitsikamma, based on interviews with government personnel and scientists. The government's final decision is also provided.

### Background

Tsitsikamma National Park, on the southeast coast of South Africa, is a 60-km-long protected area that includes a narrow strip of coastal forest and extends 3 nm out to sea. Recreational line-fishing from the shore was

initially allowed at a number of sites in the MPA, but was reduced to a 3-km length of shoreline in 1978. In 2000, that area was closed, too, to protect collapsing reef fish populations, and because middle- to up-market tourism was flourishing without fishing.

Disputes over fishing rights to the area have persisted since the designation of the park. In 1994, local fishermen formed the Tsitsikamma Angling Forum to negotiate with authorities, and in early 2006 the group requested access to 50% of Tsitsikamma for line-fishing. The Minister of DEAT authorized a task team in late 2006 to investigate the possibility that 10% could be reopened. The task team proposed such a management action in April 2007, subject to further exploration of the likely impacts of the proposal.

In September 2007, frustrated with what they perceived as slow progress on the access question, 70 members of the angling forum forced their way into the park and spent the day fishing illegally in one of the proposed open areas. A final proposal from DEAT, which recommended opening 13% of the MPA but restricting

access to only two days per month per fisher, was referred to the Minister in October 2007.

### Arguments for reopening

The main argument in favor of allowing limited line-fishing from shore was to normalize a situation where progressively stricter conservation measures had been imposed without the broad support of communities living directly landward of the park. Poor to middle-income people living within only 3-5 km of the sea typically have to travel between 20 and 60 km to go angling. Notably, shore angling is allowed throughout the adjacent Robberg MPA about 60 km to the west, as well as the Goukamma MPA 100 km away.

Reopening part of the park to fishing would build support from these communities for the park and its conservation measures. The communities would in fact be direct beneficiaries of those conservation measures, which currently favor more affluent residents who live or own properties along the boundaries of the park. The proposal was intentionally made for recreational fishing so as not to divide communities between those who might have qualified for subsistence access (if it were to be allowed) and those who would not.

Because many of the marine species inside the park are highly resident, areas that were proposed to remain closed would conceivably be affected very little by fishing in the open areas. Thus the closed areas would continue to provide conservation and stock-building benefits outside the MPA. Although catch rates of most species would be expected to decline inside the open areas, an experimental approach (for a period of 12 months) would monitor and evaluate the impacts of the reopening and respond adaptively to any unforeseen effects.

### Arguments against reopening

Tsitsikamma protects populations of many species of reef fish, which have been heavily depleted by exploitation. Advances in fishing gear and continuing escalation in fishing pressure outside the MPA make it imperative that the site remains uncompromised. The fishery outside the park is poorly managed with inadequate enforcement, and there is a significant contrast in the density and size structure of fish populations across MPA boundaries. Catch data from the 3-km fishing area prior to 2000 indicate that fishing on the scale that was proposed could deplete a number of resident fish species in the areas in as little as one year. Should this happen, it is likely that anglers would request access to other parts of Tsitsikamma, with the potential for depleting those portions, too, if the requests were granted.


The MPA is relatively large by global standards and people who reside in the area claim that they are unfairly disadvantaged. While this may be the case, the MPA has been in

existence since 1964 (although largely open to shore angling up to 1978) and lies adjacent to a relatively lowly-populated part of the coastline. Most settlement in this area took place after 1964. Compromising the MPA would likely lead to further recruitment losses to adjacent areas, where many more people are dependent on existing commercial and recreational fisheries.

Closing areas elsewhere — outside Tsitsikamma — to compensate for reopening part of the MPA has been proposed. But one would have to wait decades before these areas could be expected to build up the conservation capital that lies in Tsitsikamma. Most of the fish species are slow-growing, long-lived species (>20 years of age).

### Conclusion

In November 2007, DEAT Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk ruled to keep Tsitsikamma fully no-take. He cited MPAs as being a key part of South Africa's strategy to manage vulnerable ecosystems in a sustainable way, providing the life-support system needed to resuscitate ailing oceans and collapsing fish stocks. He added that because of the country's forward-looking approach, South Africa "counts amongst the world leaders" in implementing MPA-related goals set at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Of South Africa's coastline, 18% is in protected areas.

Van Schalkwyk also noted that the fishers were recreational (so food security was not an issue); that the reasons for designating the MPA and the underlying circumstances had not changed since his predecessor closed it to fishing in 2000; and that opening the MPA for exploitation would set "a dangerous precedent" for conservation at sea and on land. He added that because of various practical constraints, it would be difficult for effective measures to be put in place to ensure compliance with permit conditions. "MPAs are a short-term sacrifice for a worthwhile long-term gain," wrote van Schalkwyk in a media statement. "Opening the MPA for the exclusive use by a few will bring into question the value of MPAs by the remainder of fisherfolk." 

### For more information

#### Tsitsikamma National Park official website

[www.sanparks.org/parks/tsitsikamma](http://www.sanparks.org/parks/tsitsikamma)

#### Media statement by Environment Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk

[www.info.gov.za/speeches/2007/07112714151001.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2007/07112714151001.htm)

#### "Local community reaction to the no-take policy on fishing in the Tsitsikamma National Park, South Africa".

Paper by Helena Faasen and Scotney Watts (2007) in *Ecological Economics*, Vol. 64, No. 1, pp. 36-46. The paper's abstract is available for free on the journal website: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolecon](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ecolecon).

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## MPA Tip:

### On restoring seagrass after vessel damage

“MPA Tip” is a recurring feature that presents advice on MPA planning and management gathered from practitioners and publications. Below we describe an innovative technique for restoring damaged seagrass beds.

If you have a useful tip for addressing a problem in MPA planning or management, please tell us about it at [mpanews@u.washington.edu](mailto:mpanews@u.washington.edu). We would like to feature it in a future issue of *MPA News*.

Seagrasses are underwater plants that provide vital services to marine ecosystems, both as food and habitat. They often occur in extensive “meadows” in nearshore waters, and their shallow location exposes them to multiple stressors, including damage from vessel propellers and anchors. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in the U.S. has experimented with a technique to restore seagrass habitats scarred by vessels. In short, it involves planting posts (“bird stakes”) in the damaged areas to encourage seabirds to land there. Over time, the birds’ excrement serves as an effective fertilizer for re-establishing seagrass in the scarred areas. The research publications listed at bottom detail the success of the technique.

“Damage by vessels, particularly propeller scars, lends itself to rehabilitation by bird stakes,” says Brian Keller, southeast regional science coordinator for the U.S. Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. “This is because the width of the damage can be in-filled by seagrasses, particularly ‘weedy’ species such as *Halodule wrightii* in the Florida Keys system, without sediment stabilization or addition. Small or narrow areas of damage lend themselves best to this approach.”

Keller notes that bird stakes will not be effective in all seagrass-rehabilitation cases. Larger areas of vessel damage benefit more from other measures, including sediment fill and sediment tubes as described in the publications below. And bird stakes could actually be counterproductive in cases where seagrass habitat has been degraded by nutrient loading from land-based pollution sources, a major cause of seagrass decline worldwide. “Factors such as nutrient loading are best addressed at the source,” says Keller.

For detailed descriptions of the bird stake approach and other methods of restoring vessel-damaged seagrass:

#### **Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Seagrass Restoration In the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**

[http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/library/fk/seagrass\\_fpeis04.pdf](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/library/fk/seagrass_fpeis04.pdf)

#### **2002 - 03 Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Science Report: An Ecosystem Report Card After Five Years of Marine Zoning**

[http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/conservation/fk\\_report.html](http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/conservation/fk_report.html)

#### **Case Studies: Paying for Seagrass Restoration in the Florida Keys**

[www.csc.noaa.gov/mpass/casestudies\\_floridakeys.html](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/mpass/casestudies_floridakeys.html)

## Notes & News

### **DVD: India workshop on marine reserves**

Proceedings from an October 2007 workshop on fisheries and marine reserves in India are available on DVD. Organized by Greenpeace India, the workshop convened fishermen, scientists, conservationists, and MPA practitioners to discuss the role of MPAs in marine resource conservation, and how participants could work together to achieve common goals. The DVD contains Powerpoint presentations from the workshop, audio recordings, short films, and a declaration signed by participants in English, Hindi, and other coastal languages. For more information or to order the DVD, e-mail Sanjiv Gopal, oceans campaign manager for Greenpeace India, at [sgopal@dialb.greenpeace.org](mailto:sgopal@dialb.greenpeace.org).

### **Proceedings: Mediterranean MPA conference**

Presentations from the 1st Conference of the Network of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (MedPAN), held at Port-Cros National Park in France in October 2007, are available online at [www.medpan.org](http://www.medpan.org). The meeting’s 110 delegates signed the “Port-Cros Declaration”, which called for more action to create a coherent, representative, and effectively managed network of MPAs in the Mediterranean Sea by 2012. MPAs currently cover 4% of the Mediterranean, according to WWF.

### **Proceedings: UK conference on MPAs**

A new report summarizes findings from an October 2007 conference to discuss the creation of a network of MPAs in the UK. The conference, *Towards a Coherent Network of Marine Protected Areas*, was sponsored by Natural England, the UK government’s statutory body on nature conservation in England. The 53-page report of the meeting is available in PDF format at <http://naturalengland.communisis.com/naturalenglandshop/docs/NERR006.pdf>.

### **Advisory committee recommends model for effective MPA management planning**

The U.S. Federal Advisory Committee on Marine Protected Areas has recommended a brief framework to guide the development of plans for effective MPA management. The model is summarized in the committee’s latest recommendations, released in November 2007 and available at [www.mpa.gov/pdf/fac/fac\\_recommend2noaadoi\\_nov07.pdf](http://www.mpa.gov/pdf/fac/fac_recommend2noaadoi_nov07.pdf). The document also includes a recommended process for determining which existing MPAs in the U.S. should constitute a forthcoming national system of MPAs. For a complete list of the Committee’s products since 2003, go to [www.mpa.gov/mpafac/fac.html](http://www.mpa.gov/mpafac/fac.html).