Marine Protected Area (MPA)

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DEFINITION

A globally applicable, general term to describe any protected area in the marine realm which aims to conserve nature and maintain healthy oceans.

DESCRIPTION

Marine Protected Area (MPA) is an umbrella term to describe a wide range of protected areas for marine conservation around the world. A global definition specifically for MPAs - as distinct from the general definition of a protected area - was first adopted by the IUCN in 1999.[1] The definition was revised in 2012 and the distinction between a marine and terrestrial protected area was removed, aligning the definition of MPAs with the definition of a 'protected area' as *"a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values"*.[2] To be included within the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), MPAs must be sites, located in the marine environment, that meet the most recent IUCN protected area definition.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has a specific definition for marine and coastal protected areas (MCPAs) - *"an area within or adjacent to the marine environment, together with its overlying waters and associated flora, fauna, and historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by legislation or other effective means, including custom, with the effect that its marine and/or coastal biodiversity enjoys a higher level of protection than its surroundings"*,[3] which is aligned with the IUCN protected area definition, but is specifically designed to ensure that the advice given to CBD Parties is applicable to both marine and coastal areas.

All MPAs are designated for the purpose of conservation of biodiversity or cultural heritage. The designation of MPAs and MPA networks is driven by a range of international, regional, and national obligations and initiatives. Types of MPAs vary widely across regions but names for these MPA types (e.g. marine reserve, strict marine protected area) are not consistent between regions. MPA types can be used to describe the specific habitats they aim to protect (e.g. New Zealand's Benthic Protection Areas[4]). More commonly, however, MPA types vary according to the protection being granted (e.g. no-access zones, no-take or no-impact zones). Although the legal designation of specific MPAs is done by national governments, communities may establish sites under their management, often termed Locally

Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), but these sites are not always officially recognised by their own national governments.

SUPPORTED BY

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), along with many regional and national non-governmental organisations, support the idea of MPAs as an effective tool for the conservation of marine biodiversity and important resources. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 and the 5th World Parks Congress in 2003 called for establishment of a representative global network of marine protected areas by 2012. [5] More recently, the 9th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD in 2008 urged Parties and other Governments to increase the effective protection and management of marine ecosystems. [3] The Regional Seas Programme implements specific activities and projects on MPAs in several of the Regional Seas regions [6], for example within the framework of ICRAN [7] (East Asia, Caribbean, Pacific and East Africa).

YEAR OF CREATION

Although there is no single official instrument created to implement MPAs, the CBD is the most important international instrument addressing protected areas and the CBD Conference of Parties (CoP) agreed in 2004 that marine and coastal protected areas are an essential tool for delivering CBD targets on the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity. [3]

COVERAGE

Global. There are approximately 15,000 MPAs, but since many of these are overlapping designations, the total coverage of MPAs is a better metric for measuring conservation progress. MPAs currently cover about 7% of the ocean’s surface. This represents a quadrupling of overall MPA coverage over the last 10 years, but highlights the need for continued effort if CBD Aichi Target 11 is to be met, which aspires to protect at least 10% of the global marine and coastal environment within MPAs by 2020. [9]

It is also worth noting that 20 of the largest MPAs comprise of 60% of the current MPA coverage. Furthermore, the vast majority of MPAs are in Territorial Seas (0-12 nautical miles from the coastline), whereas only just over 1% of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (beyond 200 nautical miles from the coastline) are covered by MPAs. [8] While there has been rapid progress in creation of MPAs, there are concerns as to whether the Aichi target can be reached at the current rate of MPA establishment. [10]

For more information on the current coverage of protected areas in the marine environment visit Protected Planet's dedicated marine page https://www.protectedplanet.net/marine

CRITERIA

Historically, MPAs were established on an ad hoc basis at the national level. There are no universally applicable criteria for establishing MPAs and MPA networks, however a number of national, regional and ‘best practice’ guidelines exist (e.g. [1], [12], [13]). Commonly mentioned criteria for the establishment of MPAs include naturalness, a high conservation value, feasibility, and a coherent management plan. Similarly, common criteria for establishing MPA networks include representativity of the wider area, connectivity of habitats and ecological processes and the replication of habitats/species in separate MPAs within the network.

MANAGEMENT

There are many different types of MPAs with the protection measures ranging from multiple-use to strict protection within ‘no-take’ or ‘no-access’ zones. Most MPAs tend to be more permissive, often implementing zones or seasonal restrictions that allow certain types of use.
The IUCN protected area management categories reflect the diverse range of purposes for which marine protected areas are declared (see IUCN protected area management categories for further information about the IUCN categories). IUCN has published specific guidelines on how to apply its protected area management categories to MPAs, aiming to help authorities to maintain consistency in the ways that the management of both terrestrial and marine protected areas is described. [14]

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – Legal recognition and protection is likely to be present in these sites, although there are many areas important for marine conservation that are unprotected. Some MPAs are legally protected due to military interests. The protection of MPAs is also integrated into various policies and environmental safeguards of international financial institutions. These guidelines are regularly updated to incorporate recent developments in the field of conservation. IUCN has also published guidelines on the legislation of Protected Areas [14], which includes a section on the special considerations that must be taken into account when implementing legislation for MPAs. Such special considerations include the three-dimensionality of marine space, the exceptionally high connectivity between ecosystems, and the large proportion of ocean which falls in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).

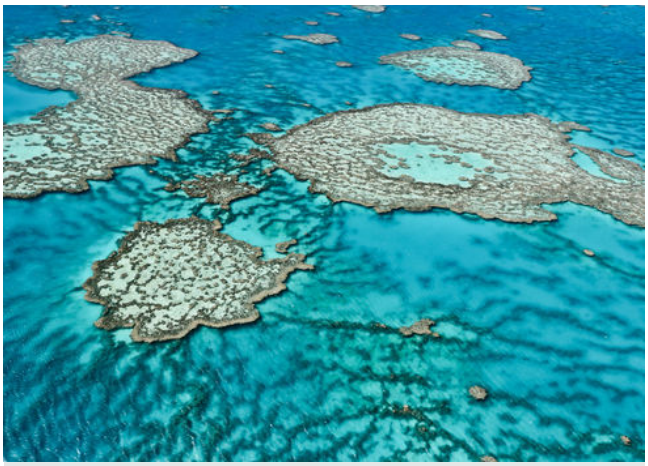
Biodiversity importance – The MPAs are important areas of conservation of marine biodiversity and maintain productivity of oceans. The MPAs are site-scale units and are therefore highly relevant for mitigating and avoiding the risks of loss of marine biodiversity.

Socio-cultural values - Recognition of traditional practices, cultural values, rights and involvement of local/indigenous communities in protection, use and management is one of the criteria for identification of the MPAs. In establishment of several MPAs, local communities’ rights to use and their role in management planning is emphasized.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

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Great Barrier Reef MPA, Queensland, Australia. Edward Haylan/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

Protected areas (Areas)

Tools

Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for terrestrial and marine protected areas.

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