



Applying IUCN’s Global Conservation Standards to Marine Protected Areas (MPA)

Delivering effective conservation action through MPAs, to secure ocean health & sustainable development

Applying IUCN’s Global Conservation Standards to MPAs is a synthesis of the existing IUCN Green List Standard for Protected and Conserved Areasⁱ, together with current relevant policies taken from approved IUCN Resolutions and Guidance documentsⁱⁱ. Designed to support Governments, Agencies, NGOs, Donors, Community-Based Organizations, MPA managers and many others, this document brings all this information together for the first time into this single format to inform the fair and effective design and management of MPAs.

Scaling-up full protection

ENCOURAGES IUCN State and Government Agency Members to designate and implement at least 30% of each marine habitat in a network of highly protected MPAs and other effective area-based conservation measures, with the ultimate aim of creating a fully sustainable ocean, at least 30% of which has no extractive activities, subject to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

IUCN Resolution: WCC-2016-Res-050-EN

Completing high seas coverage

CALLS ON States individually and as IUCN Members to address ocean governance gaps in the protection and conservation of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction through the negotiation of a new implementing agreement under UNCLOS for the protection and conservation of high seas biodiversity.....

IUCN Resolution: WCC-2012-Res-074-EN

MPAs and international obligations for ocean conservation

The ocean is essential to the healthy functioning of planet Earth, yet it is in decline. MPAs can help conserve and restore ocean ecosystems, and rebuild ocean biodiversity, which will also help to sustain the world’s human population. The UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 and Aichi Target 11 under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity explicitly recognize the need for networks of effective Marine Protected Areas.

Proven benefits from MPAs include:

- Biodiversity conservation – species, genes and ecosystems
- Improved fisheries – increased biomass and stock replenishment
- Climate mitigation and resilience – enhanced ecosystem resilience and carbon storage
- Disaster risk reduction – protecting coastlines and coastal populations from extreme weather, tsunamis and coastal erosion
- Restoration – providing places to restore ecosystems such as reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves
- Tourism and recreation – economic and health benefits to coastal communities
- Protection of cultural and spiritual resources and values – saving our history and sacred places
- Research and education – building an understanding of our ocean and promoting good stewardship
- Models of fair and open governance – MPAs can recognize rights and help share benefits and reduce conflicts through transparent and inclusive decision-making processes

Furthermore, research shows that the benefits derived from MPAs are commensurate with good design, the degree of resourcing providedⁱⁱⁱ, the degree of protection afforded through fair governance and effective management, and the scale at which they work together as a conservation network. With the rapid decline in ocean health, scientists, conservationists and some governments have called for at least 30% of the ocean to be highly protected in no-take MPAs, to support resilience and recovery for ecosystems, habitats and species^{iv}. The benefits, opportunities, and advantages of well-designed, established, and managed MPAs are proven and documented to grow over time.

Meeting the MPA definition

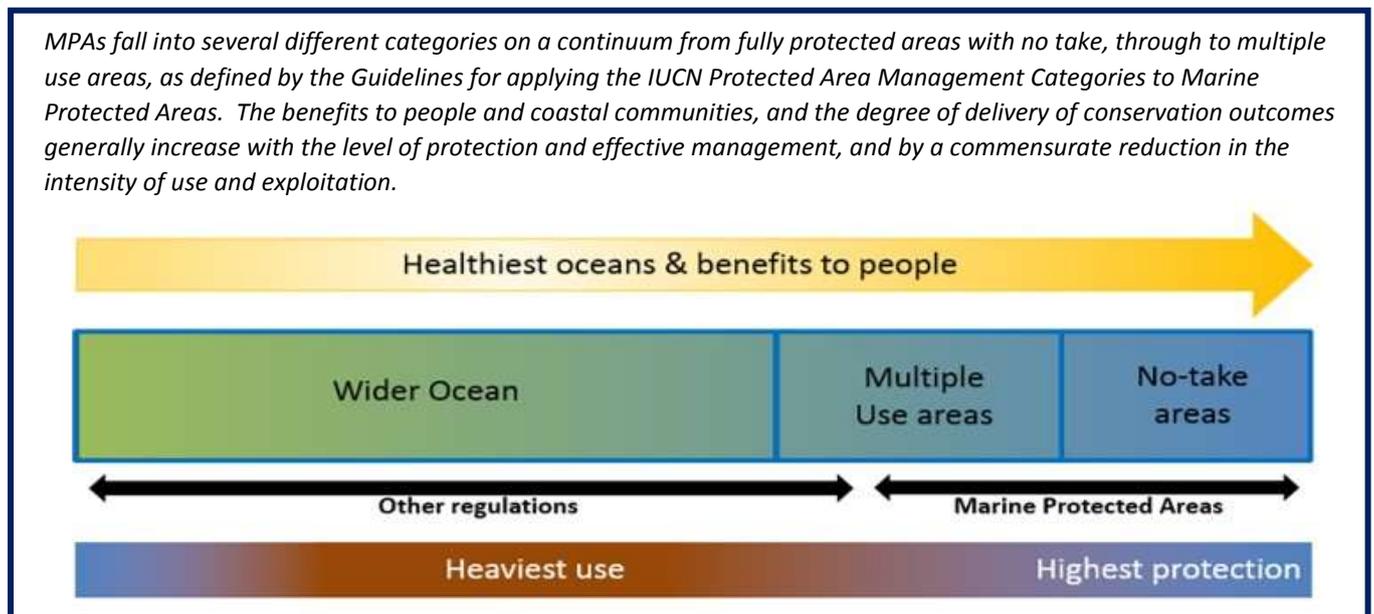
For an area to qualify and be recognized as an MPA it must meet the IUCN protected area definition:

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^v.

Essential characteristics that a MPA needs to have:

- conservation focused with nature as the priority
- defined goals and objectives which reflect these conservation values
- suitable size, location, and design that deliver the conservation values
- defined and fairly agreed boundary
- management plan or equivalent, which addresses the needs for conservation of the MPA's major values, and achievement of its social and economic goals and objectives
- resources and capacity to effectively implement

MPAs, extractive uses and wider ocean management



MPAs are part of a suite of management options needed to help sustain ocean health. MPAs provide high quality, *in situ*, and targeted nature conservation, and can range from fully protected areas, to areas that zone and allow for some multiple use. The strategy and focus for MPAs and MPA networks should be protection of those areas most important for conserving marine biodiversity. The key difference between MPAs and other area-based measures is that, whatever form the MPAs take, the primary focus must be conservation of biodiversity. Area-

based measures where the primary goals are something else, such as sustainable fishing, do not qualify as an MPA. If fishing or other extractive activities are compatible with a MPA's objective(s), and are permitted within the MPA, they must have a low ecological impact, be sustainable, be well managed as part of an integrated approach to management, and fit within the definition and category of an IUCN protected area. Any industrial activities and infrastructural developments (e.g. mining, industrial fishing, oil and gas extraction) are not compatible with MPAs^x. A growing body of knowledge about biodiversity can help support existing MPA designations and inform the identification of new MPAs. Such sources of knowledge include EBSAs^{vi}, IMMAs^{vii}, marine IBAs^{viii}, and KBAs^{ix}.

Applying IUCN's Global Conservation Standards to MPAs – *Beyond the numbers*

This list below follows the [IUCN Green List Standard](#) for Protected and Conserved Areas, updated by policy positions established by approved IUCN Resolutions, Recommendations and Guidance documents where these are more prescriptive. We must aim to manage the entire ocean sustainably, and highly protected MPAs are an essential part of that larger strategy. The elements and criteria below can be used to evaluate and improve the performance of your MPAs:

- **Good Governance**
 - Recognizes and promotes the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.
 - Has clearly defined, legitimate, equitable and functional governance arrangements.
 - Fairly represents and addresses the interests of civil society, rights holders and legitimate stakeholders.
 - Has governance arrangements and decision-making processes that are transparent and appropriately communicated, and responsibilities for their implementation are clear.
- **Sound Planning and Design**
 - Meets the IUCN MPA definition and is accurately assigned to an IUCN PA category.
 - Has clear, long-term conservation goals and objectives, based on a sound understanding of natural, cultural and socio-economic values and context.
 - Is well-sited and with a defined boundary.
 - Has a management plan, or equivalent documentation, with a periodic plan review and amendment process for updating/refining goal and objectives, conservation targets and management prescriptions in response to changing needs and conditions.
 - Is not vertically zoned.
 - Individually, or as part of a network of MPAs, incorporates significant no-take areas; and where in a network, the no-take areas are distributed across MPAs.
 - Is large enough to achieve the conservation objectives and goals individually or as part of a network of MPAs.
- **Effective Management**
 - Has well-constructed and defined objectives and goals for nature conservation.
 - Addresses the threats to marine biodiversity and so overall, has activities and uses that are compatible with, and support the conservation objectives and goals.
 - Has extractive activities (where these occur) that have low ecological impact, are compatible with the MPA's objective(s), are compatible with the IUCN definition and categories, and that are well managed as part of an integrated approach.
 - Does not have any environmentally damaging industrial activities or infrastructural developments located in, adjacent to, or otherwise negatively affecting it^x.
 - Regulates fisheries activities (where these occur) that are low impact, assessed and managed to the highest standards, and that do not impact the ecological integrity of the area, species levels and trophic structure. Any fishing gear used should not significantly impact other species or other ecological values.

- Has adequate resourcing, including staff capacity, as this is shown to be a key determinant for management effectiveness and success.
- Has sufficient investment in compliance.
- Has monitoring to track performance and inform adaptive management. Such monitoring should be standardized across MPAs in the network to document and demonstrate management effectiveness, and to report that conservation goals, objectives, and defined biodiversity conservation targets are being achieved.
- **Conservation outcomes**
 - Meets or exceeds the stated nature conservation objectives and goals.
 - Demonstrates successful long-term conservation of major natural values, with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

Continually improving the implementation of MPAs

Given the increasing anthropogenic changes facing the marine environment (including climate change, ocean warming, ocean acidification, ocean deoxygenation, coastal pollution, population increases, and technological changes), there is a critical need to ensure all MPAs are adaptively managed with continuous improvement across all elements of management. Flexible governance and decision-making processes are accordingly needed, which are positioned to nimbly and rapidly absorb new information about ecological and economic conditions, and threats including climate changes – and to act on these to implement adaptive management responses such as changes to management rules, zoning systems, or MPA boundaries.

This document is designed to drive this adaptive process by enabling governments, agencies, community-based organizations, donors and MPA managers to assess what actions are needed to bring their MPAs up to these global conservation standards.

Further advice on ‘other effective area-based measures’ – OECMs – will be provided once the CBD UN Convention on Biological Diversity has agreed the definition and criteria, and guidance is available

When referenced this document should be cited as:

IUCN WCPA, 2018. Applying IUCN’s Global Conservation Standards to Marine Protected Areas (MPA). Delivering effective conservation action through MPAs, to secure ocean health & sustainable development. Version 1.0. Gland, Switzerland. 4pp.

ⁱ IUCN and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) (2016). IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas: Standard, Version 1.1. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/iucn_green_list_standard_version_1.1_nov_2017_3.pdf

ⁱⁱ Dudley, N. (Editor) (2008). Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. x + 86pp. WITH Stolton, S., P. Shadie and N. Dudley (2013). IUCN WCPA Best Practice Guidance on Recognising Protected Areas and Assigning Management Categories and Governance Types, Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 21, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/guidelines_for_applying_protected_area_management_categories.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature21708>

^{iv} WCC-2016-Res-050-EN. Increasing marine protected area coverage for effective marine biodiversity conservation. https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_RES_050_EN.pdf

^v Day J., Dudley N., Hockings M., Holmes G., Laffoley D., Stolton S. & S. Wells, 2012. Guidelines for applying the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories to Marine Protected Areas. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 36pp. **BEING UPDATED**

^{vi} <https://www.cbd.int/ebsa/>

^{vii} <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/activities/immas/>

^{viii} <https://maps.birdlife.org/marineIBAs/default.html>

^{ix} <http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/what-are-kbas>

^x WCC-2016-Rec-102-EN. Protected areas and other areas important for biodiversity in relation to environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development. https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/wcc_2016_rec_102_en.pdf