



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 Organisations, 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.

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 Conventions explicitly recognise the need for networks of effective Marine Protected Areas.

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

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, sea grasses 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 recognise rights and help share benefits through transparent and inclusive decision-making processes

Furthermore, research shows that the benefits derived from MPAs are commensurate with good design, 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 least 30% of the ocean to be fully protected in no-take MPAs, to support resilience and recovery for ecosystems, habitats and speciesⁱⁱⁱ. The benefits, opportunities and advantages of well-established and managed MPAs are proven and documented to grow over time.

Meeting the MPA definition

For an area to qualify and be recognised 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^{iv}.

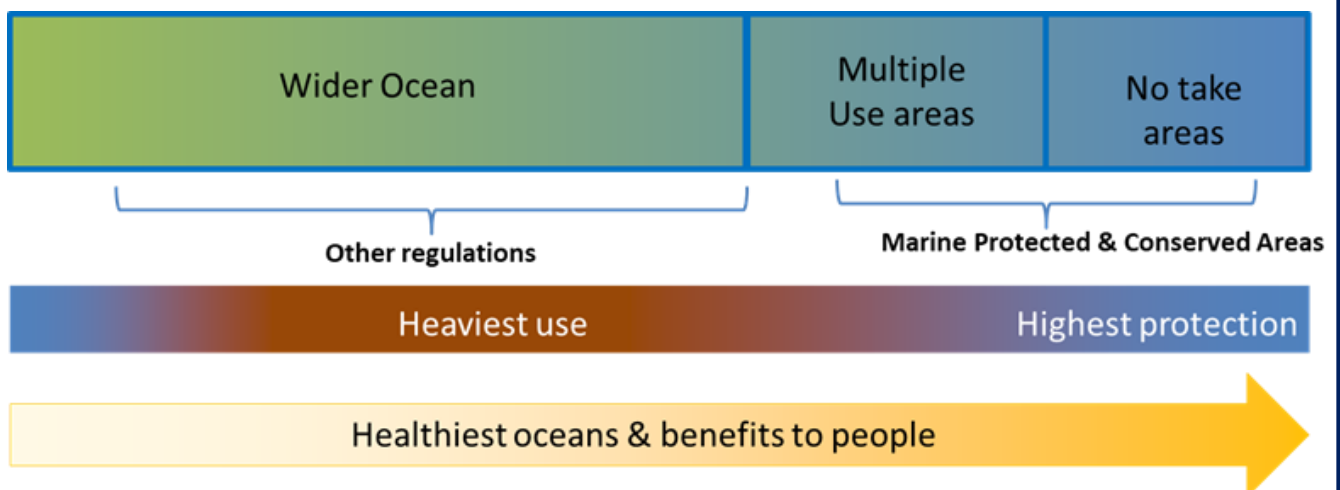
Essential characteristics that a MPA needs to have:

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

MPAs, extractive uses and wider ocean management

MPAs are part of the continuum of management 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 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. This means that fishing and other extractive activities in an MPA, if appropriate at all, have to have low ecological impact, be sustainable, compatible with the MPA objective(s), with the IUCN protected area definition and category, and well managed as part of an integrated approach. Any environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructural developments, with the associated ecological impacts and effects, are not compatible with MPAs (see footnote v).

MPAs fall into a several different categories on a continuum from fully protected areas with no take, through to multiple use areas, as defined by the Guidelines for applying the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories to Marine Protected Areas. The benefits to people and conservation outcomes, and coastal communities, increase with the level of protection and effective management, and a reduction in intensity of use and exploitation.



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

This document follows the [IUCN Green List Standard](#) for Protected and Conserved Areas, complemented by policy positions established by approved IUCN Resolutions, Recommendations and Guidance documents. 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

The MPA:

- Recognises 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 implementation are clear.

• Sound Planning and Design

The MPA:

- 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;
- is not vertically zoned;
- individually, or as part of a network of MPAs, incorporates significant no-take areas, and where in a network this no-take is distributed across MPAs in the network;
- is large enough, or is part of a network of MPAs, thereby including biodiversity fully representative of the region;

• Effective Management

The MPA:

- overall, has activities and uses that are compatible with and support conservation goals and objectives;
- has extractive activities (where these occur) that have low ecological impact, are compatible with the MPA objective(s), 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 or otherwise negatively affecting it, with the associated adverse ecological impacts and effects^v.
- 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 be demonstrated to not significantly impact other species or other ecological values.
- has adequate resourcing, including staff capacity;
- has sufficient investment in compliance;
- has monitoring to track performance, and inform adaptive management.

• Conservation outcomes

The MPA:

- meets or exceeds the stated nature conservation 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.

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

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.

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 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

^{iv} 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**

^v 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