IUCN Summary of MPAs Status

The important commitments made by the international community at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Convention on Biological Diversity to put in place ecologically representative and effectively managed networks of MPAs by 2012 and to effectively conserve at least 10% of each of the world’s marine and coastal ecological regions have sparked important efforts towards ocean conservation.

The total ocean area protected has risen by over 150% since 2003. The total number of MPAs now stands at approximately 5880, covering over 4.2 million km² of ocean. This figure equates to only 1.17% of the marine area of the world, but the focus remains largely on continental shelf areas where MPA coverage is some 4.32%. Off-shelf protection stands at just 0.91%. Although it is not possible to develop an exact account, fully protected, no-take areas cover only a small portion of MPA coverage, while a large proportion of MPAs are ineffective or only partially effective.

Rather than ecologically representative, MPA coverage is very uneven and does not adequately represent all ecoregions and habitats important for conservation. In addition to the almost universal lack of MPA coverage in offshore waters, there are major gaps in protection of coastal and continental shelf waters, particularly in temperate regions. Some 44 coastal ecoregions have more than 10% MPA coverage but 102 (44%) have a coverage of less than 1%.

One clear trend in the recent growth of marine protection has been the designation of very large MPAs – 11 MPAs are larger than 100,000 km² and together these make up over 60% of the global coverage. While such sites are to be welcomed, their overall influence on statistics masks a disproportionate lack of protection in some areas, notably in areas where human population densities are high and pressures may be more intense.

From a political perspective, almost all MPAs are located within areas of national jurisdiction and when the high seas are excluded, MPA coverage stands at some 2.88% (of areas within 200nm of the coastline). Only 12 of 190 States and territories have MPA coverage at or above 10%. In addition to national efforts, we are witnessing an increase of regional approaches for marine protected areas networks across entire regions and seas.

This is fostering collaborative management and partnerships among multiple sectors and stakeholders. Aligning data, effective communication and efficient stakeholder and community engagement are essential for success. The last few years have also helped advance global tools and efforts for the conservation and management of open oceans and deep seas, in particular in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

A biogeographic classification system of open oceans and deep seabed, including criteria for selecting biologically and ecologically significant areas, provides a scientific and technical basis for conserving marine areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. Though various
regional and sectoral conventions and instruments are increasing efforts to conserve marine biodiversity in open oceans and deep seas, there is an urgent need for further institutional improvements, cooperative mechanisms and agreements on common principles and goals for spatial management of human activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Over the last few years, climate change has become more dominant on the environmental agenda. Today we know that climate change is already affecting the ocean in many different ways and the scale and extent will continue to increase as effects take hold. By protecting important habitats and ecosystem functions, such as coastal carbon sinks, MPAs provide the foundation for ecosystem-based mitigation and adaptation strategies. Important changes in the way that MPAs are designed, managed, and governed are needed now more than ever to help assure that key components of marine ecosystems are resilient in the face of climate change.

Looking ahead at the coming decades, the combination of acute climate change impacts and a growing world population are adding ever increasing pressures on, and competition for, coastal and marine resources. To ensure that the coastal and marine capital is sustainably managed to continue to provide for the needs of the present and future generations, the ocean conservation agenda needs to shift to integrate marine management at ecologically meaningful scales. We are witnessing visionary leaders banding together to create large-scale initiatives like the Micronesia and Caribbean Challenges and the Coral Triangle Initiative with bold aspirations that explicitly link ocean protection to the well-being of their people and the development and prosperity of their nations.

Moving forward globally, we need to secure greater political will, increased human and financial capacity and improved governance and engagement with ocean stakeholders.

Marine protected areas remain a strong foundation to address ocean challenges. However, they cannot be a panacea to the heavy pressures on the coasts and oceans. For them to achieve their objectives, they need to be designed and managed effectively, taking into considerations the socio-economic needs of their surrounding communities. They also need to be part of an effective broader framework that addresses management across all sectors. Policies, planning and management have to be expanded to look beyond MPAs, to consider biodiversity conservation and management needs across the entire ocean space, within and beyond national jurisdictions.

Marine spatial planning is emerging as one of the most promising tools for creating an ecosystem-based management (EBM) approach and ensuring that coasts and oceans are managed to meet current and future demands on ocean resources. It focuses on the most concrete aspects of EBM – area-based planning and management – and addresses multiple human uses, their cumulative impacts and interactive effects.

The inevitable conclusion is that the CBD target for achieving effective conservation of 10% of marine ecological regions will not be met in time. There still remains much progress to be made for the development of comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas by 2012. As the global community is charting a new course to reduce biodiversity loss while achieving development goals and greener economies, we offer specific recommendations to strengthen the MPA foundation and move towards multi-objective integrated planning and management frameworks that embed MPAs and conservation objectives within a wider context and integrate ecological, economic and social needs.
MPAs – Some related Upcoming events

www.georgewright.org/gws2011

22 March 2011 - Symposium: The North Sea, field lab for marine protection in Leuven, Belgium
www.vliz.be/projects/westbanks/symposium/

29-31 March 2011 - "Exploring the Role of MPAs in Reconciling Fisheries Management with Conservation" in Bergen, Norway
www.imr.no/om_havforskningsinstituttet/arrangementer/konferanser/mpa_for_fisheries_2011/

9-14 May 2011 - "11th International Coastal Symposium" in Szczecin, Poland
www.ics2011.pl

11-13 May 2011 - "IV International Conference on Integrated Management of Coastal Zones (CARICOSTAS 2011)" in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba
www.cemzoc.uo.edu.cu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25&Itemid=1

14-18 May 2011 - 2nd International Marine Conservation Congress
http://www.conbio.org/IMCC2011/

3-7 July 2011 - "2nd International Symposium on Integrated Coastal Zone Management" in Arendal, Norway
www.imr.no/iczm

www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/EMECS9/

8-12 September 2011 - "2nd World Biodiversity Congress" in Kuching, Malaysia
www.worldbiodiversity2011.com/

26-30 September 2011 - "World Conference on Marine Biodiversity" in Aberdeen, Scotland
www.marine-biodiversity.org/

7-11 November 2011 – Second International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas in Martinique
http://www.icmmpa.org/
End 2011 - 17th Meeting for parties contracted on the convention for the protection of the marine environment and coastline of the Mediterranean and its protocols (Barcelona Convention)
http://www.unepmap.org/index.php?module=content2&catid=001001004

2012 – CBD COP in India
http://www.cbd.int/

End 2012 – 2nd Conference of MPAs in the Mediterranean organised by MedPAN in Marseilles
www.medpan.org

2013 - IMPAC III