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From the Editor: Definitions

Dear Reader:

An article in the [December 2001/January 2002 issue](#) of MPA News -- "Results from the Reader Challenge: Which MPA is the Oldest?" -- sparked responses (including those below) from readers who questioned the definition the newsletter used for "marine protected area". They felt the definition was too broad to be useful.

The definition used for the challenge was that of the IUCN (World Conservation Union), which describes a marine protected area as "an area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora, fauna, historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect all or part of the enclosed environment." (IUCN, 1992) Based on this definition, MPA News named the Royal National Park, designated in 1879 in New South Wales, Australia, as the oldest existing MPA. The predominantly terrestrial park features some intertidal terrain, from which the taking of mollusks is prohibited.

MPA News used this definition primarily for reasons of clarity. The IUCN definition is probably the most widely used definition in the world for marine protected area.

There is no question, however, that the definition is quite broad. Sites that could fit the definition include temporal fishing closures, single-species protected areas, and even nations' 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) -- not to mention sites that are primarily terrestrial, like the Royal National Park. To many readers -- and particularly those most interested in the sub-category of fully protected marine reserves -- the IUCN definition amounts to a distraction. Whereas MPA News had hoped to clarify the question of which MPA was oldest, our definition only clouded the matter for some readers.

Definitions on which everyone agrees are difficult, if not impossible, to create. Nonetheless, the MPA News editorial board agrees that any definition of MPA that could include EEZs probably needs some tightening. Is it time to revisit the IUCN definition?

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