

Implementing France's MPA Law: Interview with Olivier Laroussinie, Director of the French MPA Agency

After the US, which nation has the second-largest total marine area? France. With island territories worldwide, France's combined Exclusive Economic Zone and territorial sea total more than 11 million km².

France aims to establish a coherent network of MPAs throughout that marine area. To help do this, the nation passed a law on MPAs in 2006. Among other actions, the law created an Agency for Marine Protected Areas to lead the national network-building effort. Olivier Laroussinie is director of the agency. *MPA News* spoke with him about reaching his country's MPA goals.

MPA News: What challenges does France face in meeting its national and international obligations on MPAs?

Olivier Laroussinie: The main challenges are the timeframe and the huge marine area under France's jurisdiction. Like other countries around the world, we aim to have a complete system of MPAs by 2012, as agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (*MPA News* 4:3). We are also required, along with other European countries, to complete the Natura 2000 network at sea by the end of this year (www.natura.org). Yet our starting point is a network of MPAs covering a very low proportion of French waters, mostly in coastal areas. And the marine area of France is enormous, with a large proportion consisting of offshore areas.

MPA News: What role does your Agency for Marine Protected Areas play in pursuing those goals?

Laroussinie: The Agency does not have the authority to designate MPAs. Instead, it assists the public bodies that do have that authority - mainly the State, which is the principal authority at sea with the exception of local governments in the French Pacific territories. In addition to coordinating the national effort to build a cohesive system of MPAs, the Agency collects information, organizes it, and distributes it to stakeholders. The administrative council of the Agency consists of resource users, NGOs, local authorities, and State administrators. This small "parliament of the sea" is helpful in building political will to establish the national MPA system.

MPA News: France's MPA law created a new type of MPA called a marine nature park, which your agency is in charge of managing. Since passage of the law, one marine nature park has been designated and three more are under study. What is the distinction between marine nature parks and other types of MPAs?

Laroussinie: Marine nature parks feature an integrated approach. They are designated for nature protection as well as social and economic objectives. Marine nature parks are mainly designated in large areas where there are ecosystems, habitats, and species of special interest, as well as significant human activities that may conflict with each other and with protection objectives.

MPA News: Would you say that France's approach to MPAs is different from the approaches of other countries?

Laroussinie: I don't think there is a specific approach to MPAs in France. We have a range of MPA types from small, highly regulated sites to integrated management areas with little or no regulatory framework. In establishing a strategy for creating MPAs throughout the French marine domain, our first aim is to cover a representative set of ecosystems, natural heritage, and human uses. At the same time, we are also developing a monitoring system of French waters - evaluating the role of MPAs in management of the country's marine resources, and using the MPAs as observatories on the global marine situation.

For more information:

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