

Letters to the Editor

MPA News received several letters in response to the article in our May 2000 issue, "Closing 20% of the Ocean: Pro-Reserve Target is Finding Way into Policies." Some readers supported the use of percentage targets in setting aside no-take zones, while others questioned the merits. We print some of their responses below:

Targets provide certainty

Dear MPA News:

I like the idea [of percentage targets] and have been suggesting 30% in informal discussions with practitioners. Targets really caught on in terrestrial protected area management and have for better or worse stimulated provincial governments [in Canada] to develop protected areas strategies that set aside approximately 12% of the province.

There are, of course, physical and biological problems with such targets -- a species or ecological system may require 80% of the remaining habitat protected for viability -- but for the most part it has resulted in about a three- to four-fold increase in terrestrial protected areas in many parts of Canada.

Targets as a concept have caught on for many reasons. I think some of them have to do with the certainty that governments and industry are seeking. They are tired of debating every hectare and welcome the idea of a broader strategy that provides finite targets for protected areas and, by extension, more certainty over the remaining space for other uses.

In the marine environment, much science and discussion centers on defining boundaries of spawning grounds, upwelling zones, unique habitats, etc., in order to maximize the benefits from very small protected spaces or small areas connected via corridors. I just returned from the Science and Management of Protected Areas Conference and I have the impression that many in attendance shared frustration over the lack of action taken to set aside MPAs. Many seem to be endorsing the position of using the best available information to design a network of MPAs and adjusting it as needed to improve the system when better information becomes available. Some workers seem to be caught in a program of very difficult analysis to try and definitively determine boundaries that will minimize the area set aside while maximizing benefits.

Intuitively, I think our analysis will fail on some levels due to the complexity of natural systems that we can only hope to partially understand or model. To counter our fallibility we need to set aside many large marine areas in offshore and coastal areas to ensure we capture processes we cannot fully understand but nonetheless depend upon for ocean health and the survival of all species, including our own.

Brian Reader

Ecosystem Manager
Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve
Parks Canada
E-mail: Brian_Reader@pch.gc.ca

Brian Reader's comments above are solely those of the author and are not meant to represent any interest, position or policy of Parks Canada.

Cookie-cutter approaches have failed

Dear MPA News:

Thanks for opening this particularly slimy can of worms. I get very nervous when a management convention gets thrown around as "the thing to do." Most cookie-cutter approaches to resource management have failed miserably. In order to ascertain whether 20%, 40% or 100% of an area should be closed, significant knowledge about stock status, interactions with habitat components and forage and predator species, migration and life history must be gained. It will be very site- and species-specific.

In the case of Puget Sound [in northwestern Washington, US], so many fish stocks are declining that perhaps the whole thing should be closed for a period of years to gauge recovery potential. Most fish depend on various habitat types throughout their life history. Closing an area of spawning habitat while allowing significant impacts on the juveniles from water quality, for example, may hurt chances of success and unfairly label the closure response as an ineffective strategy. In the case of many MPAs, the recovery of the habitat from destructive fishing methods such as trawling may be infinitely more important to fisheries recovery than reduced harvest.

I will concede that sometimes, in order to start the dialogue and set a baseline by which adaptive management will be based, this requires setting an arbitrary management convention. I urge those who do this, however, to write it into the policy that such a convention is experimental and to be conducted in conjunction with other management strategies that preserve and enhance the entire ecosystem. The convention and other management strategies will be studied programmatically to determine their effectiveness, and adjustments will be made.

Doug Myers

Wetlands and Habitat Specialist
Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team (Washington, US)
E-mail: DMyers@PSAT.WA.GOV

MPA size should be based on good science

Dear MPA News:

In your last issue, you referenced the position of fishermen in the reworking of California's MPA system under the Marine Life Protection Act. *[Editor's note: This legislation did not include a percentage target.]* Our organization -- the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, or PCFFA -- was involved in the development of that legislation.

Our concern with the 20% target is that from what scientific material we can find, the number seems to have been picked out of someone's nose. In some instances, such as with coral reefs, the area needed for protection may be much greater than 20%, while for other areas 20% appears excessive. The critical issue for us is that the amount (size) and nature (protected habitats, no take zone, etc.) of any MPA should be based on good science. The problem we have had is that a lot of the Ph.D.s and others seem to have forsaken science for celebrity.

As the late Nat Bingham once testified to the California State Legislature, "I do not see much benefit in 'locking up' vast areas of the ocean, such as the suggestion of 20%, merely for the sake of prohibiting fishing. Protected areas to be effective do not have to be large necessarily, but carefully selected for their attributes and well placed."

People who want to see our full comments on MPAs can go to our website at <http://www.pond.net/~pcffa>.

Zeke Grader

Executive Director
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
E-mail: Fish4IFR@aol.com

The PCFFA is the largest fishermen's organization on the West Coast of the US.

Philippines has 15% target

Dear MPA News:

The Philippines in 1998 passed a new Philippines Fisheries Code which sets a goal of 15% of municipal waters (out to 15 km) be set aside as fish sanctuaries. These are defined essentially as no-take zones. Seems the Philippines are a bit ahead of the US and most other nations with respect to legislation. Meeting that goal, on the other hand, will be a challenge, but may be possible by 2010 or 2020.

Brian Crawford

Coastal Resources Manager
Coastal Resources Center
University of Rhode Island (US)
E-mail: crawford@gso.uri.edu