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## Letters from Readers

[The letters below are in response to an article in *last month's* MPA News, "Results from the Reader Challenge: Which MPA is the Oldest?" The article named the Royal National Park, in New South Wales, Australia, as the oldest marine protected area in the world.]

**Dear MPA News:**

In New South Wales, there are currently 42 national parks and nature reserves with recognized marine/estuarine components. All, including the Royal National Park, are reserved under the National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974. This legislation provides for protection of animals, terrestrial vegetation and substrata, but does not directly protect fish, marine invertebrates or marine vegetation (these fall under the Fisheries Management Act 1994). The park's management plan today does not specifically address the management of its "marine protected areas" or the marine biodiversity within them.

Certainly national parks and nature reserves can play an important role in protecting both marine/estuarine and adjacent terrestrial habitat, but it seems to me a misnomer to pronounce an area a "marine protected area" when it cannot directly protect fish. I would therefore argue that calling Royal National Park the world's oldest marine protected area is drawing a very long bow, and does little to clarify what a marine protected area is or should be.

The fault is not with your competition. Rather, I think the IUCN definition of "marine protected area" [which MPA News used in adjudicating] is too loose. It gives greater importance to permanency -- through its phrase "reserved by law" -- than to what is actually being protected.

Sincerely,  
Jane Frances  
Manager, Protected Areas, New South Wales Fisheries

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**Dear MPA News:**

I see that your definition of MPA is pretty loose. You include areas that allow for sport fishing. This is like including wildlife refuges that allow for big game hunting in a definition of wild game protected areas.

I would assert that there are all kinds of marine protected areas with varying degrees of protection from a variety of extractive and potentially damaging activities. Standardizing the definitions between MPAs, marine reserves, marine wilderness, etc., would seem to be a key task for all of us involved.

An important component of any system of MPAs is area where all extractive activities including recreational and guided sport fishing are excluded along with other commercial fishing extractions and other commercial activities including various forms of tourism.

In Alaskan waters, we have thousands of square miles of coastal waters closed to various kinds of commercial fishing. Does this mean that they all qualify as marine protected areas? Certainly they merit some recognition, but not the same type of recognition as areas where the real tough decisions to protect the marine area from all extractive, polluting, and damaging activities have been made.

Sincerely,  
Eric Jordan

Commercial fisherman

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