

## Letters from Readers

Last month, MPA News printed two letters suggesting the IUCN definition of "marine protected area" was too loose to be truly useful ([MPA News 3:7](#)). These letters, in turn, prompted responses from individuals who were instrumental in the development of the IUCN definition. Their letters appear below.

**Dear MPA News:**

I'd like to refer to the debate regarding the definition of an MPA. This term is intended by IUCN to be a general one, describing areas that are subject to various levels of protection. It is directly and intentionally analogous to the IUCN definition of a "protected area". Readers of your newsletter should recognize that, under both general terms (PA and MPA), there are six categories of protected area that are intended to cover the range of degrees of protection.

The IUCN categorization scheme took four years to develop, involving thousands of people. As one who was involved in this exercise, I'd have to advise people (other than obsessive masochists) to refrain from repeating this exercise. It might seem like a simple job, but it's not. It might also be worth noting that the most recent IUCN categorization scheme resulted from a perception that the preceding one was deficient. I don't think the existing one is significantly better.

People interested in the 1994 IUCN publication *Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories* can find it on the IUCN website in PDF format (<http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/pdfs/IUCNCategories.pdf>).

**Graeme Kelleher**

12 Marulda Street, Arenda, Canberra ACT 2614, Australia. Tel: +61 2625 11402; E-mail: [g.kelleher@gbmpa.gov.au](mailto:g.kelleher@gbmpa.gov.au).

---

**Dear MPA News:**

Perhaps a little further information would be useful on IUCN's definition of an MPA, following the correspondence in your last issue ([MPA News 3:7](#)). As the editor pointed out, this definition is probably the most widely used. The reasons for this are probably: (1) that it was the result of extensive consultation and debate across nations and between individuals involved at all levels in MPA management at the time it was drawn up; and (2) because, intentionally, it is designed to apply to a wide range of types of MPA - from large multiple use areas with strictly protected zones within them, to areas specifically designed to be totally protected.

Nevertheless, there have been many debates about whether it needs revising. Publications that address the issues surrounding the question of "What is an MPA" include the MPA theme issue of *Parks* (Vol. 8, no. 2, June 1998) and a 1998 WWF International discussion document on MPAs (to find out how to obtain this, e-mail Renate Dominique at [rdominique@wwfint.org](mailto:rdominique@wwfint.org)). Before moving into detailed discussion through MPA News, readers might like to consult these sources. The following points summarize some of the issues, and respond to questions raised by your correspondents.

A "protected area", in IUCN terms, must be primarily focused on the protection of biological diversity, since IUCN's definition of a protected area is "an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means". Thus EEZs are not included, since they are not established primarily for the purpose of biodiversity conservation. The MPA definition could perhaps be tightened by changing the final words "enclosed environment" to something like "enclosed environment for the purpose of protecting and maintaining its biodiversity".

Jane Frances [[MPA News 3:7](#)] suggests that the IUCN definition puts too much emphasis on permanency through its phrase "reserved by law". However, the complete phrase is intentionally "reserved by law or other effective means". This phrase arose out of the need to include areas protected through traditional or community mechanisms, or by means other than western-style law. However, the definition does indeed cover areas with only a tiny proportion of marine environment, which may seem inappropriate. Furthermore, it is not clear whether fishery "management areas", where the primary purpose is protecting or enhancing fisheries stock, should be included - at one level these can be seen as important for biodiversity protection.

For those who work on MPAs in a range of countries and situations, the most important thing is to be clear about what you are talking about in any particular instance. If it is widely accepted that "marine protected area" is a general term for an area set

aside for conservation, whether on a multiple-use or strict-protection basis, perhaps that term should be left alone. We then need to use more precise terms for areas in which fishing or removal of organisms is prohibited. There are many names for these, and perhaps it would be useful to find a generic term. One problem is that, in many countries, protected area terms have specific legal definitions, and it would be a long expensive job to harmonize these. Thus, a Marine Reserve in Belize is, by law, a multiple use area, with zones for different activities, some of which will be closed to extraction; and in Kenya it is an area where traditional forms of fishing are allowed (compared with a Marine Park in which there is no fishing). A generic definition for a no-take area will thus require careful selection of words.

**Sue Wells**

Coordinator, Marine and Coastal Programme, IUCN Eastern African Regional Office, P.O. Box 68200, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel. +254 2 890606; E-mail: [smw@iucnearo.org](mailto:smw@iucnearo.org).

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/letters-readers-0#comment-0>