

MPA Nomenclature: The Thicket of Terms and Definitions Continues to Grow

What's in a name? Perhaps more than you bargained for, if you're in the field of MPAs. With practitioners seeming each month to cook up new terms for particular types of marine protected areas, staying up-to-date on the ever-expanding MPA dictionary has become somewhat challenging. Even at MPA News we sometimes can't remember the difference between a marine reserve, marine life reserve, and ecological reserve (or are they all the same...?).

To some extent, political prudence has driven the flourishing of terms describing MPAs. Several MPA experts, for example, have created new terms for "no-take zone" in an effort to put the idea of fish stock recovery in a more positive light for stakeholders, who are often fishermen. Rather than use a term with a potentially negative connotation like "no-take zone", the manager might use a term like "fish replenishment area", which focuses on the idea of rebuilding fish stocks instead of decreasing short-term harvests.

However, some critics have suggested that the growing thicket of terminology may be counterproductive to resource protection. Without a common understanding -- and, ideally, a legal basis -- for what these terms mean, they may end up meaning nothing, or everything. A marine protected area, sanctuary, or park established with no formal definition of these terms could in reality have no protection.

Does consistency in terminology matter? We at MPA News think it's a worthy goal. So, following the lead of the Australian government, which is embroiled in developing a nationally consistent nomenclature for marine protected areas by 2001, MPA News initiates a discussion of MPA terminology:

The IUCN Basics

"Marine protected area" is used as a catch-all term: a no-take zone is a marine protected area, but a marine protected area is not necessarily a no-take zone. Definitions from the IUCN (World Conservation Union) for "protected area" and "marine protected area" are used commonly throughout the world to describe MPAs:

Protected Area (IUCN 1994): "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."

Marine Protected Area (IUCN 1992): "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 part or all of the enclosed environment."

The IUCN also defines six general categories of protected area management:

- Ia. Strict Nature Reserve: protected area managed only for science
- Ib. Wilderness Area: protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection
- II. National Park: protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation
- III. Natural Monument: protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features
- IV. Habitat/Species Management Area: protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention
- V. Protected Landscape/Seascape: protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation
- VI. Managed Resource Protected Area: protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems

National Definitions of MPA

Regulators of MPAs have adapted the IUCN definitions to their particular circumstances. Here are three national definitions of MPA and one state-level definition:

Australia: Australian Conservation Agencies use the IUCN definition for Protected Area (above) as the basis for their definition of MPA. Notably, in establishing its National Representative System of MPAs, Australia has elected to distinguish MPA from

other "marine managed areas" -- such as exclusive economic zones -- in that an MPA is established especially for the conservation of biodiversity and can be classified according to at least one of the six IUCN categories.

Canada: Under the Oceans Act, a marine protected area "is an area of the sea that forms part of the internal waters of Canada, the territorial sea of Canada or the exclusive economic zone of Canada and has been designated for special protection...." The purposes given for such protection all relate to conservation and protection, such as of fisheries, endangered species, unique habitats, high biodiversity, high productivity, or other marine resources or habitats.

US: The US has no official definition for Marine Protected Area. Its National Marine Sanctuaries, however, are codified as: "[A]reas in the ocean from the shore to the edge of the continental shelf and in the Great Lakes that are distinctive for their conservation, recreational, ecological or esthetic values...." US law declares that the federal government will "preserve and restore such areas by designating them as marine sanctuaries and providing appropriate regulation and management."

California (US): In its Marine Life Protection Act, signed into law in October [MPA News 1:3](#), the State of California defined MPA as: "A named, discrete geographic marine or estuarine area seaward of the high tide line or the mouth of a coastal river, including any area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora and fauna that has been designated by law, administrative action, or voter initiative to protect or conserve marine life and habitat."

Terms that have appeared in MPA News

Listed here are MPAs that have appeared in recent issues of MPA News (with volume and issue, and location of use), with their protective use restrictions:

Ecological Reserve ([1:1](#), Florida Keys, US) = All extractive activities prohibited.

Highly Protected Zone ([1:1](#), Macquarie Island, Australia) = All extractive activities prohibited.

Species/Habitat Management Zone ([1:1](#), Macquarie Island, Australia) = Mining prohibited but some commercial fishing allowed.

Fish Replenishment Area ([1:1](#), Hawaii, US) = Aquarium fish collecting prohibited.

Marine Sanctuary ([1:2](#), Washington, US) = Oil drilling prohibited but commercial fishing allowed.

Marine Life Reserve ([1:3](#), California, US) = All extractive activities prohibited.

International Peace Park [proposed] ([1:3](#), US/Canada) = All extractive activities prohibited.

Marine Sanctuary ([1:3](#), Apo Island, Philippines) = All extractive activities prohibited.

There is little agreement on terms for MPAs, and this will likely remain the case as the field continues to grow. At MPA News, we will continue to focus attention on new terminology as it arises and keep readers up-to-date on trends in usage.

We would like to hear from you regarding the growth in MPA terminology. Last year, Ben Haskell of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (US) wrote on the CMPAN internet listserv (reprinted here with his permission): "I'm not sure if consistency in [MPA] nomenclature really matters -- there's no consistency on land and the system seems to work. What matters is what the user can or can't do once they arrive at the MPA and whether those regulations are enforced." Do you agree? Please send your ideas to mpanews@u.washington.edu; we look forward to printing replies.

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