

Notes & News

Coalition launches effort to establish West African MPA network

A coalition of environment and fisheries ministers from West African nations have agreed to establish a network of national and transboundary MPAs in the region and restore fisheries to sustainable levels, among other goals. The "Regional Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in West Africa" aims to allow the harmonization of protection efforts within five years, based on a shared vision of sustainable development and poverty reduction. It will involve the governments of Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Senegal.

"The point is that we realize our MPAs have a number of shared resources," says Ibrahim Thiaw, West Africa regional director for IUCN. (IUCN helped spearhead planning of the strategy with WWF, Wetlands International, and the International Foundation for the Banc d'Arguin.) Such shared resources include marine animals such as sea turtles, but also human populations that migrate from one country to another, says Thiaw. Some existing marine and coastal national parks in the region are under intense pressure from artisanal and industrial fishing: Senegal, with a total population of 10 million, has 600,000 people working in the artisanal fishing sector. Coastal development and offshore oil exploration pose additional threats, he says. The strategy will address all threats to marine and coastal sustainability in the region, not just fishing.

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Norway protects more cold water corals from bottom fishing

The Norwegian government has continued its push to protect deepwater coral reefs with an announcement that bottom trawling will be banned at two reefs off the coast of southern Norway. The restrictions, to be applied under national fisheries legislation, will protect the 1.2-km long Tisler reef and the Fjellknausen reef, whose size is not yet determined. Coordinates of both protected areas will be based upon scientific research and consultation with local fishermen. Both reefs are at depths of more than 75 m, and were discovered by researchers just last year.

Although parts of Tisler and Fjellknausen have been damaged by past shrimp trawl activity, officials say most of each reef is still healthy. The new protective measures will follow similar actions by the fisheries ministry to protect the 43-km long Rost reef in January 2003 and the smaller Sula and Iver reefs in recent years ([MPA News 3:5](#)). The government has protected another coral reef, Tauraryggen, under formal MPA legislation - so far, the only reef in Norway to be designated a marine reserve. In contrast to the other reefs, whose restrictions are limited to fishing, Tauraryggen is protected against all potentially damaging activities, including anchoring, dredging, laying of pipe, and coral sampling.

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Indonesia pledges to double its MPAs in three years

The Indonesian minister of marine affairs and fisheries has pledged to double the size of his nation's MPAs in the next three years and ensure that any fishing in these areas is sustainable. Signing a letter of intent in June, Minister Rokhmin Dahuri said the effort would increase Indonesia's MPA holdings to 10 million hectares (100,000 km²). In a joint announcement, Conservation International, a US-based NGO, said it would provide US\$1 million to create a trust fund to support management

of these MPAs, and is seeking other donors to participate. Dahuri said he hoped other Southeast Asian nations would follow his country's lead in protecting marine resources. "Only through protected areas can we protect the long-term prosperity of our fishermen," he said.

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Tourism leaders to seek more MPAs in Caribbean

Leaders in the Caribbean tourism sector have pledged to work together with government and NGOs toward designation of more protected areas throughout the Caribbean Sea, among other initiatives intended to protect regional biodiversity and strengthen the tourism industry. The agreement, devised at an April 2003 meeting in the Dominican Republic, calls on the private sector to help identify priority sites for protection through the overlap of biodiversity hotspots and tourism attractions. Convened by the US-based Center for Environmental Leadership in Business, the two-day meeting involved nearly 100 participants from throughout the Caribbean, including executive-level officers of cruise lines, airlines, and resorts. A meeting summary and event report are available online at <http://www.celb.org/caribbean>.

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IUCN project to examine application, impacts of precautionary principle

The precautionary principle states that action to protect the environment may be necessary before scientific certainty of harm is established. In light of the principle's increasing use in natural resource management, IUCN has co-launched an initiative to determine what such precaution means in actual practice, and develop guidelines for its application. (Other partners on the project include TRAFFIC, Fauna & Flora International, and Resource Africa.)

The Precautionary Principle Project seeks input from practitioners worldwide of on-the-ground experiences with the principle and perspectives on issues/problems related to its application, particularly in the developing world. "The precautionary principle is a vital policy principle in natural resource management and conservation, but it needs to be applied in ways that are equitable and effective in the context of developing countries," says Rosie Cooney, project coordinator. She says uncertainty is perhaps more fundamental in marine systems than terrestrial ones, due to humans' comparative lack of knowledge about underwater environments. The project website, with background on the principle and the project's activities, is <http://www.pprinciple.net>.

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Draft strategy released for MPA social science research in US

The MPA Science Institute of the (US) Marine Protected Areas Center has released a draft strategy to guide the nation's social science research related to planning, management, and evaluation of MPAs. Prioritizing key information needs and describing the methods necessary to meet those needs, the draft strategy is based on an expert workshop in 2002 ([MPA News 4:1](#)) and is open for public comment until July 11, 2003. It is available online in PDF format at <http://mpa.gov>. The final strategy is expected to be published in August 2003.

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