

Perspective: Twenty new MPAs for South Africa!

Editor's note: In 2016, *MPA News* interviewed [Kerry Sink](#) of the South African National Biodiversity Institute ([SANBI](#)) about the innovative Operation Phakisa effort to designate a network of MPAs throughout South Africa's waters. The project was based on the concept of [Big Fast Results](#): *phakisa* means *hurry up* in the Sesotho language. Although the new MPA network took somewhat longer to be approved than anticipated (March 2017 was the initial goal), it is now here.

Sink is a scientist at the South African National Biodiversity Institute and was lead of the Operation Phakisa Oceans Economy Marine Protected Area technical team. Tamsyn Livingstone is a GIS analyst at [Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife](#) and a member of the team that used hundreds of map layers to support the achievement described in this piece. (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is the conservation management agency for South Africa's province of KwaZulu-Natal.)

By Kerry Sink and Tamsyn Livingstone

On 25 October 2018, South Africa announced that the nation's Cabinet [approved](#) 20 new marine protected areas for designation in 2019. The announcement represented the long-awaited implementation of the [Operation Phakisa Oceans Economy Marine Protected Area Network](#). This establishes South Africa as a leader in African ocean protection, and contributes to protection of both the Southeast Atlantic Ocean and Southwest Indian Ocean – a uniquely South African opportunity!

The [20 areas](#) include 18 new MPAs and expansions of Aliwal Shoal MPA and the conjoined Maputaland and St. Lucia MPAs. Together, the sites add approximately 50,000 km² to South Africa's protected area estate. This is an area over two and a half times the size of the Kruger National Park, South Africa's largest protected area on land. It will increase protection of South Africa's waters from 0.4% to 5%. (This figure excludes the 180,000-km² MPA in South Africa's sub-Antarctic [Prince Edward Islands territory](#).)

Mr. Derek Hanekom, the Acting Minister of Environmental Affairs, said that these areas "will considerably advance South Africa's efforts to protect our ocean heritage for future generations. They will contribute to fisheries sustainability, advance marine ecotourism, and will help maintain resilience in ecosystems that are under stress from climate change."

Underpinned by systematic biodiversity plans

The network is very spatially efficient: 85% of South Africa's currently defined 136 marine ecosystem types are represented in a network that covers 5% of our ocean territory. It is underpinned by several systematic biodiversity plans, including the five-year [Offshore Marine Protected Area project](#), which identified focus areas for protection in 2011. Several of the MPAs will also contribute to management of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas in South Africa's oceans.

The new network provides the first protection for the Namaqua ecoregion (along the country's west coast) and for several threatened and fragile ecosystem types, including threatened mud, gravel, and shelf edge habitats and sensitive deep water scleractinian, stylasterine, and soft coral-dominated ecosystem types. The new MPAs represent seamounts, submarine canyons, volcanic pinnacles, and a variety of ecosystem types on the shelf, continental margin, and abyss in both the Indian and Atlantic oceans.

The network is zoned with principles for zonation guided by specific objectives for each MPA, and consideration of the compatibility of each activity with protection goals. The network is unique in striving to support multiple objectives for biodiversity and fisheries management in alignment with ocean economy goals.

Further information about the network will be provided at the upcoming [Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties](#) in Egypt this month (17-29 November). A future article in *MPA News* will examine challenges faced and lessons

learned from the Operation Phakisa MPA project.

Celebrate and explore our upcoming the new MPAs by visiting www.marineprotectedareas.org.za

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