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Science Panel Calls for More Reserves as Management Tools

Marine resource managers should increase their use of marine reserves, or no-take areas, as a supplement to conventional management tools, according to a new report from a committee of the US National Research Council (NRC). The report argues that the lack of experience with marine reserves should not stop managers from implementing them in an adaptive manner.

"Declining or poorly managed fish populations and damage to marine habitats are discouraging signs that conventional ocean-management practices are insufficient," said NRC committee chair Ed Houde in a statement following the report's release. The report provides a survey of scientific evidence in support of reserves.

The NRC is the principal operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences, a private, nonprofit institution that provides scientific and technical advice under charter from the US Congress. The committee that wrote the report consisted of academics from the fields of marine resource management and marine ecology.

Ecosystem-based management

Conventional US fisheries management has focused on individual species. The NRC report endorses the use instead of an ecosystem-based approach, citing research to show that seabed habitats are being degraded by fishing and other human activities. The committee notes that the overall goal of marine management should be to maintain the health of ecosystems beyond the area protected within reserves. Conventional fishery regulations in open areas and controls on damaging activities will still be necessary, according to the committee.

The report assesses the scientific basis of techniques used for the location, design, and implementation of reserves, drawing on examples from the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and elsewhere. It also recommends ways to improve implementation, and identifies future avenues of research.

The report was sponsored by the National Oceanic and Administration, the National Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service.

Box: Report available online

To view an online version of the report, *Marine Protected Areas: Tools for Sustaining Ocean Ecosystems*, go to <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/9994.html>. The published version of the report is forthcoming from the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20418, USA. Tel: +1 202 334 3313.

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