

Sharpening our focus on MPAs for 2020 and beyond: The emerging consensus on what is and is not an MPA, and the key types of MPAs

Nearly 500 MPA practitioners worldwide tuned in to a pair of webinars in early December 2018. The online events examined the standards all MPAs should meet, and defined what is and is not an MPA. They also presented the emerging consensus around types of MPAs according to their stage of establishment and level of protection. These clarifications may well play a fundamental role in determining whether the world meets international targets to protect 10% of the ocean by 2020. They may also influence the MPA field's post-2020 agenda.

Co-hosted by MPA News and the (US) National Marine Protected Areas Center, the webinars are now available to view as recordings:

- The 4 December event, which described the conservation standards for MPAs and details of a global initiative to develop clear language to define MPA status and protection level, [is here](#).
- The 10 December event, which functioned as an extended question-and-answer period for the first webinar, [is here](#).

Both events featured Naomi Kingston of UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC); Dan Laffoley of IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas-Marine; and Jane Lubchenco and Kirsten Grorud-Colvert of Oregon State University.

An MPA's primary objective must be nature conservation

As addressed in the webinars, IUCN recently clarified its [Protected Area Standards](#), drawing all of IUCN's previously scattered guidance and policies into a single place. These standards reiterate the point that an MPA is an area whose primary objective is the conservation of nature. Areas with different primary objectives, such as fishery management or military functions, are not MPAs even though they may provide some conservation benefit.

A parallel category called 'Other Effective Conservation Measures', also discussed in the December webinars, was recently [defined](#) by the Convention on Biological Diversity's Conference of the Parties, held in Egypt, and may be relevant to non-MPA areas.

The MPA Guide: Formal guidance to address confusion on how much protection actually exists and the likely outcomes from different types of MPAs

The webinars offered a preview of The MPA Guide, a system that works directly with the IUCN protected area categories to add a framework for classifying MPAs according to (1) the MPA's stage of establishment and (2) its level of protection. The MPA Guide recognizes that there are four general steps in the establishment of an MPA: announced, legally designated, implemented on the water, and actively managed (i.e., with monitoring and adaptive management in place). The Guide also provides clarity around four categories of biodiversity protection in MPAs (fully protected, highly protected, lightly protected, and minimally protected) and the conservation outcomes that can be expected from each level of protection. (The 4 December webinar in particular provided detail on each of these terms.) The target release for The MPA Guide and associated products and peer-reviewed articles is this coming year, 2019.

The effort to develop The MPA Guide, led by the webinar presenters and financed by [Oceans 5](#), was driven largely by arguments and confusion around how much protection currently exists and what reasonable outcomes can be expected from any particular MPA. The [World Database on Protected Areas \(WDPA\)](#), which presents the official global data on protected coverage, calculates that [over 7%](#) of the world ocean is protected. But Marine Conservation Institute's [Atlas of Marine Protection](#) (MPAtlas), which provides independent validation of MPA parameters, including whether a site has been

implemented, calculates the figure to be less than 4%. Some of the disparity may be due to different definitions of MPAs, and some to different decisions about when along the continuum of establishment an MPA should be counted.

Convergence of coverage calculations?

Because the project has aimed to reduce confusion between the two main calculations of MPA coverage, there is hope that the consensus will result in convergence. For example, the WDPA and MPAtlas will now both follow the IUCN definition of an MPA and they will use the same terms (e.g., “implemented”) in the same way. Naomi Kingston of UNEP-WCMC said that The MPA Guide provides the opportunity to assess which of the protected areas reported to the WDPA are designated, implemented, *and* actively managed, as well as the level of protection each site has. This will move the field from the challenge of having a single number for describing global MPA coverage to a transparent dissection of that number.

Whether this means the WDPA calculation will go down or the MPAtlas calculation will go up, or both, remains to be seen. Kingston said there would likely be some shifts in which sites would be included as data providers take on board the simplified MPA Standards from IUCN and new MPA Guide categories. She added, though, that the shifts would be difficult to predict, as sites are continually entering and exiting the WDPA depending on governmental decisions. Laffoley of WCPA-Marine said that what this new clarity means in practice is that it is no longer good enough for governments to just report an MPA; the new consensus should drive countries to report transparently what is happening on the water and to aim for the final stage of adaptive management — thus ensuring that an MPA is both effective and responsive to the latest challenges.

Grorud-Colvert noted the value of many different types of MPAs and the clarity The MPA Guide will bring to assessing the outcomes of MPAs with different goals and protection levels. Lubchenco seconded that. “The whole reason this effort came about was as a result of the confusion,” she said. “Having clarity will help everyone.”

MPA News will continue to report on The MPA Guide work in 2019.

Source URL: <https://www.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/sharpening-our-focus-mpas-2020-and-beyond-emerging-consensus-what-and-not-mpa-and-key#comment-0>