

## Steering the behavior of MPA users: Why a diversity of approaches is the key to MPA governance

The concept of MPA governance refers to the mix of approaches used at each MPA to steer user behavior. This steering is done through some combination of state control ('top-down'), community-based approaches ('bottom-up'), and market forces. By grouping these, an MPA can build regulations that are perceived as effective and equitable by the communities they impact.

An example would be an MPA that is gazetted in national law (top-down), involves local stakeholders in planning (bottom-up), and fosters development of alternative livelihoods that are compatible with the site's goals (market forces).

Peter Jones of University College London has researched MPA governance for the past decade. MPA News last interviewed him on his work in [2014](#). Recently he published [28 case studies on MPA governance](#), bringing his project's total to 51 cases on specific sites worldwide. His new publication also breaks down the full range of incentives that an MPA can use to steer behavior – from payments for ecosystem services, to assessing penalties for rule-breaking, to building on local customs, and many more. There are dozens of potential incentives in all.

MPA News asked Jones for his thoughts on his latest research, and why managers should pay attention to governance. His ideas are below:

### **On why it's important for MPA managers to consider the governance of their sites:**

"Human behavior – fishing, tourism, coastal development, etc. – is what leads to impacts that can undermine an MPA's effectiveness. So it is important for MPA managers to focus on governance as the way to modify that behavior through an appropriate combination of incentives. Remember: management is focused on people in the social system, not the ecological system.

"It is also crucial to ensure that local customs and traditional ways of life are conserved, that the participation of local people is provided for, and that the costs and benefits of conservation are fairly shared. In other words, the MPA is equitable. Equitable management is a key element in [Aichi Target 11](#) for MPAs under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Our research is focused on promoting MPAs that are both effective and equitable, with governance being the essential means of achieving both."

### **On why diversity is the key to governance:**

"The main aim of our MPA governance research has been to test the hypothesis that diversity is the key to resilience – not only for species in ecosystems, but for incentives in governance systems. The hypothesis has proven true. Our growing number of case studies has enabled us to provide practical guidance for MPA managers and policymakers on how to combine a diversity of governance incentives to promote effectiveness and equity."

### **On the main misconception regarding MPA governance:**

"The main misconception about MPA governance is still that 'bottom-up is best,' and that the state should not interfere. The state often plays a very important role in providing for legal incentives, and can also be a promoter and approver of potentially conflicting development and activities. Legal incentives and some state oversight are needed not only to promote effectiveness – through legal incentives such as enforcement capacity and penalties for deterrence – but also to ensure that inequalities that may exist at the community level do not lead to unfair decisions.

"Sometimes you similarly hear that 'market approaches are best.' We need to move beyond this thinking and broaden our focus to encompass a diversity of functionally integrated incentives. We need to recognize that diversity is the key to resilience, through a combination of governance approaches."

**For more information:**

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On 7 July 2021, Peter Jones is presenting his latest research on MPA governance in a webinar co-hosted by OCTO and the NOAA National MPA Center. For details or to register, [click here](#).

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