

What Will MPA Planning and Management Be Like in 10 Years?: MPA Practitioners Forecast the Future

This month marks the 100th issue of *MPA News*. From the publication of our first issue nearly a decade ago, the field of marine protected areas has changed in significant ways. Some of these changes have been technological - including new, sophisticated software to help plan MPA networks - and others financial, such as the increased use of endowments to fund sites. The measurement of MPAs' effectiveness has emerged as a widely accepted part of management. And, perhaps most importantly, governments worldwide have agreed on the need for representative systems of MPAs, and set deadlines to meet that goal.

However, in other ways, the MPA field has remained the same. MPA practitioners still face many of the same basic day-to-day challenges they did in the 1990s: ensuring compliance, securing adequate funding, monitoring their resources, building management capacity, etc.

So what should we expect from the MPA field in the next decade? This month *MPA News* asked several practitioners to forecast what the MPA field might look like by the time of our 200th issue. We asked them:

"Ten years from now, how will MPA planning and/or management be different from today?"

The answers below are in their own words and represent their personal views. Their comments do not necessarily reflect the positions of their organizations

MPAs will be part of a "nimble" system of oceans management

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Between now and 2018, world leaders will have realized that declines in ocean health and productivity caused by poor management, and exacerbated by climate change, can no longer be tolerated. Fisheries depletions and jellyfish invasions, harmful algal blooms and dead zones will have threatened so many areas and species - including humans - that priority will be placed on protecting and restoring the ocean's integrity and resilience. A "nimble" system of oceans management and governance will operate at local, national, regional and global levels to deliver ecosystem-based management in an open, equitable and adaptive manner. Networks of highly protected marine areas will be established to preserve the remaining healthy areas and restore the degraded ones.

By 2018, in marine areas beyond national jurisdiction - commonly referred to as the high seas - an international ocean agency will be established on behalf of all States and the global community. The laws of the sea will be enforced to allow access to the ocean and its resources only to those who abide by internationally and regionally agreed rules. The agency will be advised by a panel of scientific experts whose tasks include the development of bioregionally based spatial management plans. Such plans will allocate certain areas beyond national jurisdiction to specific (well-managed) uses as well as dedicate other areas for protection as part of a coherent network. Illegal activities will no longer thrive due to an effective global surveillance and enforcement system. Instead, the fish and responsible fishers will thrive, and all society will benefit.

MPAs will be fully accountable and performance-based

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In ten years' time, all MPA planning and management will be done using decision support tools. The ad hoc planning and management of huge natural assets will be seen as inappropriate - as ridiculous as running an engineering firm without modeling and economic software. Some of the more enlightened marine reserve networks will have public and auditable

biodiversity accounts that inform us transparently and credibly about their state. These accounts will be derived from cost-effective long-term monitoring regimes. Monitoring with no apparent purpose will be a thing of the past.

Once we have professional and expert management and accounting for marine reserves then international companies and governments will begin to invest in these natural assets by buying auditable outcomes. For example, countries or agencies that can deliver transparent and credible data that show they are maintaining or restoring biodiversity in their marine ecosystems will be rewarded and become prosperous. The bottom line: MPA management will become a fully accountable and professional enterprise that rewards performance based on outcomes. These professionals will be as highly trained as engineers and be continually retrained.

There will be greater stakeholder engagement in planning

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One lesson that we have learned (often the hard way) and we are increasingly applying is that stakeholders' engagement in MPA planning and management is key to the success of MPAs. While the need to involve local communities and stakeholders is largely recognized all over the world, and while there are several examples of effective partnerships with various sea users, we still have a long way to go to achieve genuine engagement with stakeholders especially during the planning process. There are numerous examples of recently planned MPAs that still do not consider stakeholders' interests, or where their engagement comes in very late stages - more to comply with an obligation rather than genuinely understand their concerns and needs. This inevitably leads to conflicts and problems in enforcement.

I think (and hope) that ten years from now, engagement with local communities and stakeholders will be systematic and will have actually incorporated the numerous lessons we have learned from current examples of partnerships with local communities and stakeholders. Their views and interests will be taken into account from the early stages of planning processes. MPA planning and management will also pay attention to building and improving the capacity of local stakeholders so they can effectively engage in decision-making processes and management activities. This will contribute to increasing trust between the various actors, and a greater commitment to complying with MPA regulations.

There will be more, and more-diverse, MPAs

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From a Norwegian perspective, MPAs in ten years' time will become more common and more diverse in terms of what they protect. The number of MPAs is set to increase considerably. And there is a need to design MPAs so that they match the biological, legal, economic and political circumstances in various regions.

I think we also will see a stronger temporal element, with the level of regulation varying through the year. In terms of decision-making, it seems that the move toward ecosystem-based management by way of comprehensive management plans has fostered a culture of multi-sectoral cooperation.

There will be greater use of management systems that reflect political and economic compromise, and tradeoffs between use and protection

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MPA management in the tropics will change slowly in the next ten years due to the inertia of the current management training and practices. The benefits of management will be more widely recognized. There will be less resistance to management and more knowledge about the consequences. But greater recognition of tradeoffs and political compromises will produce management systems that reflect these tradeoffs. Management will differ in each socio-economic condition and will often include more restrictions on gear and allowable catch as opposed to the fishing/no-fishing dichotomy.

There will be continued exploration of how to increase the participatory process and to increase the responsibilities and diversity of managers and sharing of responsibilities with users. But effectiveness will continue to be constrained by cost limitations. This will lead to more specific local-level solutions that have low financial, social, and opportunity costs. Management will, therefore, move toward systems reflecting tradeoffs. Restricted-use areas - in which there are regulations on use but not a total ban - will become more politically feasible, supported, and self-managing than large fishing closures. This will help solve the paper park problems, but will also come with the recognition that marine wilderness is only seldom achievable in most countries.

There will be greater recognition of the need for strict protection

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Anyone with first-hand experience of establishing MPAs can attest that ten years is not a long time (unless you count it in gray hairs). In many places, ten years is about how long it takes to build sufficient support before proposals to create an MPA get taken seriously.

But individual struggles aside, ten years are enough time for great strides to be taken in MPA policy. I would have been delighted to know in 1992 when I was in my second year of research on MPAs that ten years on, the World Summit on Sustainable Development would commit coastal nations of the world to establish national networks of MPAs by 2012. My hope is that the next ten years will see a similar step-change in the way nations approach the management of their MPAs.

Many countries, my own included (UK), see MPAs as a means of balancing competing and conflicting activities in the sea. They view them as tools to allocate access to resources among different users, rather than as tools of protection. There is still a great reluctance to admit that past human uses of the sea have seriously compromised the integrity, richness, and value of ocean habitats. We will see little benefit from most MPAs while they remain lightly protected. Ten years from now, I hope that managers will recognize more willingly the need for high-level protection from human impact to redress past losses, recover ecosystems, and rebuild their resilience. I also hope that the scale of our ambitions for coverage of highly protected MPAs will have risen in tandem.

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