

## World Summit Calls for MPA Networks by 2012

Representative networks of marine protected areas should be established worldwide by the year 2012, and depleted fish stocks restored by 2015, according to an action plan agreed upon by global leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held earlier this month in Johannesburg, South Africa. The agreement also calls on governments to incorporate an ecosystem approach in fisheries management by 2010, eliminate subsidies that contribute to fishing-industry over-capacity, and protect marine biodiversity on the high seas.

While vague on details for implementation, the fisheries accord represented an early breakthrough at the summit, sidestepping the objections of a group of countries, led by the US, to binding targets. The US, however, did successfully add the phrase "where possible" to the goal for restoring fish stocks, in light of the fact that some stocks could require much longer to recover than the 2015 target, even with little or no fishing occurring.

The full WSSD action plan agreed to by the 189 countries in attendance is available in Word format on the web at <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org>. The 54-page document ("Plan of Implementation") covers a wide range of issues on global sustainable development; the fishing accord begins with Item 29 in the plan.

### Reaction to the fisheries accord

Graeme Kelleher, former chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and co-editor of the multi-volume work *Global Representative System of Marine Protected Areas* (1995), said that critics may regard much of the WSSD fisheries accord as a "wish list". However, he said, the document could prove to be very useful.

"The main positive attributes are the setting of a time frame for the establishment of representative systems of MPAs, and the recognition that urgent action is needed on the high seas - beyond national jurisdictions - to protect biodiversity and achieve sustainable fisheries," said Kelleher. "If international agencies, regions, governments and communities adopt these as specific objectives and establish specific work plans to achieve them, together with the provision of the necessary resources, it could make a significant difference to the rate of protecting global marine biodiversity and to achieving sustainable fisheries."

Daniel Pauly, a fisheries biologist at the University of British Columbia (Canada), says the foundation of the fisheries agreement stands on work already done in MPA and fisheries science. Pauly was lead author on a paper published in the 8 August 2002 issue of the journal *Nature*, which called for strong reductions in fishing-related subsidies and the creation of representative networks of no-take MPAs.

"The rapid decline in various fisheries throughout the world makes setting up networks of marine protected areas an obvious step to take," said Pauly in response to the accord. "The science demonstrating their effectiveness is being done, and the arguments of those who oppose them are wearing thin. Thus, various governments and local communities have begun on their own to set up - or at least consider setting up - MPA networks. Later, when more MPAs will have been created, people might say it is because of the [WSSD] declaration that we advanced. But it will have been mainly because of the work in the field of the many people who knew that establishing no-take areas in the ocean was the right thing to do."

#### For more information:

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### BOX: A Perspective on the WSSD Accord

By **Bud Ehler**, Vice-Chair (Marine), IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

Oceanic, coastal, and island issues were not on the initial WSSD agenda, which emphasized development issues, especially

those concerning water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity. However, thanks to the mobilization of interested governments, NGOs, and United Nations agencies early in the WSSD preparatory process, advances in ocean, coastal, and island issues represent one of the most important outcomes of the World Summit.

Government delegates negotiated and agreed on an action plan for oceans, coasts, and islands, with quite specific targets and timetables for action. Of special interest to the MPA community is the timetable for applying an ecosystem approach to marine areas by 2010 and for establishing a global network of marine protected areas by 2012. Important targets were also established on fishery issues (e.g., managing fishery capacity by 2005 and controlling illegal fishing by 2004), and in other ocean-related areas as well. The targets and timetables found in the WSSD Plan of Implementation represent an important advance over actions taken in Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 at the 1992 Earth Summit that had provided few specific targets and timetables for action.

Two questions should be asked: (1) Is this really significant?; and (2) How can we be sure that such targets and timetables will be implemented?

Specialized groups such as the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and specialized agencies such as the FAO have, of course, over the years effectively argued about the need, for example, to take an ecosystem approach to marine areas and for creating a globally representative network of marine protected areas. A consensus on these issues by the "expert community" has been clearly in evidence for some time now. What is certainly significant about the adoption of the MPA targets and timetables at the WSSD is that the expert consensus has now been enshrined as a global imperative by the world's political leaders.

The WSSD targets and timetables, of course, are not "self-implementing". Instead, governments around the world will need much assistance and support from groups such as the World Commission on Protected Areas to identify and make operational what needs to be done, and to maintain the high-level political support that will be required to achieve the sorely needed "on-the-ground" changes in the health and condition of marine ecosystems.

Toward this end, the WCPA will be mobilizing with other groups to work together with governments, international and intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and others to implement the commitments made in the Plan of Implementation of the WSSD as well as to implement the so-called "Type II initiatives" (voluntary partnerships among governments, nongovernmental organizations, industry, and others).

An important outcome of the World Summit has been the formation of a "Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts, and Islands," involving a wide number of NGOs, international organizations, and governmental ocean leaders who will work with the world's governments in ensuring that the targets and timetables are met and in integrating the related voluntary initiatives. The Global Forum will, among other activities, hold periodic meetings to review progress in WSSD implementation, starting with a November 2003 conference at UNESCO in Paris. A first step in this process will be to analyze, for each major target, the knowledge and other resources that countries will need to meet the WSSD commitments, and to develop a strategy for assisting the countries in accomplishing these goals. The World Parks Congress, to be held in September 2003, in Durban, South Africa, will also be an opportunity to examine progress toward the WSSD targets and timetables related to marine protected areas.

**For more information:**

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