

NEW SCIENTIFIC SYNTHESIS GUIDES SMART DECISIONS ABOUT OCEAN PROTECTION

A peer-reviewed study, published in *Science* today (10th September 2021), provides a novel scientific framework to consistently understand, plan, establish, evaluate and monitor ocean protection in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

Authored by 42 marine and social scientists from 38 institutions across six continents, *The MPA Guide: A Framework to Achieve Global Goals for the Ocean* enables the global community to advance understanding of ocean protection and achieve global goals to reverse biodiversity loss through MPAs. *The MPA Guide* categorises each area according to four levels of protection - fully, highly, lightly or minimally protected - tracks whether protection has been activated in the water, and matches both of those with the benefits the MPA can expect to deliver.

“The benefits from MPAs are key for our future. For the first time, *The MPA Guide* provides a way to track those benefits using a unified structure, shared language and consistent approach. This will provide an evidence-based understanding of where we stand on ocean protection,” said **Dr. Kirsten Grorud-Colvert, Associate Professor at Oregon State University and lead author of *The MPA Guide***. “With this clarity, we can monitor our global progress and identify the science-based actions required. We need to ensure MPAs are set up for success to safeguard our ocean and its benefits from the devastating consequences of human overuse.”

A culmination of a decade of inclusive, collaborative research involving hundreds of scientists and diverse stakeholders *The MPA Guide* comes at a key time as countries prepare to negotiate the target of protecting at least 30% of the ocean by 2030 at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meeting in Kunming, China in 2022.

While MPAs are a central tool for ocean conservation, not all MPAs are the same. There are wide-ranging types of MPAs with various goals, regulations, and consequently, outcomes. This variety causes confusion. For example, some MPAs allow fishing, aquaculture and anchoring, while others do not. Some MPAs are included in official tallies despite not being active in the ocean. In the absence of guidance on how to categorize MPAs or to determine their likely outcomes, there is considerable inconsistency. One result is a mismatch between what an MPA is expected to accomplish and the actual outcomes. A second result is the lack of a reliable way to monitor how much ocean is actually protected, leading to inaccurate numbers and disjointed understanding about how much protection actually exists worldwide.

By providing the science, evidence and framework to categorise different types of MPAs and track their progress, *The MPA Guide* aims to equip all stakeholders with the tools and practical guidance they need to ensure MPAs are designed optimally to deliver on their goals of conserving biodiversity and benefitting people.

There are four core components to *The MPA Guide*:

- **Stages of Establishment** specifies an MPA’s status – whether it only exists on paper or is in operation.

- **Levels of Protection** clarifies the degree to which biodiversity is protected from extractive or destructive activities.
- **Enabling Conditions** provide the principles and processes needed to plan, design and govern a successful MPA.
- **Outcomes** describe the conservation and social results that can be expected from an MPA at a particular stage and level, provided the enabling conditions are in place.

The MPA Guide will be continually tested and adjusted. National trials are already underway in France, Indonesia, and the United States of America, where MPA experts are using it to analyse and categorise existing MPAs so that communities and governments can make informed decisions.

“Because a holistic, inclusive and integrated approach has been taken in devising this guide, we find we can readily apply it to our work. For us, the clarity that *The MPA Guide* provides really helps inform our work on MPAs in South Africa to best achieve the goals we have for our ocean. It looks to provide solutions that will last long into the future,” said **Dr. Jean Harris of WILDOCEANS in South Africa** and co-author of the paper.

Practical trials are also being conducted to improve the transparency and understanding of MPA data globally. The UNEP-WCMC-Protected Planet team and other *MPA Guide* partners are working with a wide range of stakeholders to assess how the *Guide* can help resolve fundamental challenges in global MPA tracking and reporting, including how it can be integrated into reporting mechanisms for new MPAs.

“*The MPA Guide* has been designed to build on and complement existing systems, such as the IUCN Protected Area Categories,” said **Dr. Dan Laffoley, co-author of the paper and Marine Vice Chair of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas**, a lead partner on *The MPA Guide*. “It fills in a complete picture of the protection that an MPA provides, which will be useful from local to global levels as countries scale up ocean protection.”

“*The MPA Guide* reflects a collective ambition to find unity in language and consistency in approach to conserving biodiversity in the global ocean. With it, we can bolster international dialogue and collaboration and provide the transparency we need to assess protected areas and ensure they are designed to deliver the best results for restoring biodiversity,” said **Dr. Naomi Kingston, Head of Operations at the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)**, co-author of *The MPA Guide* and a lead partner of the initiative. “If the global community can use it to scale up the level of protection, extent and effectiveness of MPAs, we can achieve our global ambition to conserve life in the ocean.”

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Notes to editors:

Link to the *Science* paper: <https://science.sciencemag.org/cgi/doi/10.1126/science.abf0861>

Link to *The MPA Guide* website: <https://www.mpa-guide.protectedplanet.net>