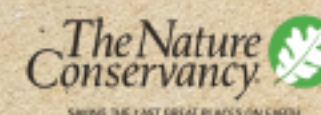


Establishing Marine Protected Area Networks

MAKING IT HAPPEN

A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING NATIONAL AND REGIONAL
CAPACITY FOR BUILDING MPA NETWORKS



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT I

❑ WHY DO WE NEED MARINE PROTECTED AREA (MPA) NETWORKS? 2

- What is an MPA network?
- Why are MPA networks important for sustainable development?

❑ WHAT ARE THE ECOLOGICAL DESIGN CRITERIA FOR MPA NETWORKS? 4

- Representativeness
- Replication
- Viability
- Precautionary design
- Permanence
- Maximum connectivity
- Resilience
- Size and shape

❑ WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING MPA NETWORKS? 6

- Clearly define objectives
- Establish long-term political commitment and will
- Encourage stakeholder participation
- Make best use of available information
- Develop integrated management frameworks
- Employ adaptive management techniques

❑ WHAT ARE THE BROADER CONSIDERATIONS NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT MPA NETWORKS ARE SET IN CONTEXT? 8

- Economic and social considerations
- Spatial and temporal considerations
- Scientific and information management considerations
- Institutional and governance considerations

❑ WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS NEEDED TO MAKE MPA NETWORKS HAPPEN AND ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS? 11

- Political will and leadership
- Public education, communication and awareness
- Monitoring and assessment
- Sustainable financing
- Compliance and enforcement

THE NEXT STEPS 15

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 15

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Regardless of where we live, all people depend upon healthy ocean ecosystems. The role that marine protected areas (MPAs) can play in promoting the health of our oceans and seas has been recognized at the highest levels. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the G8 group of Nations have all called for establishing a global system of MPA networks by the year 2012. Our challenge is to transform these commitments into meaningful action.

Yet global progress on building marine protected area (MPA) networks has been slow, in part because they embrace a range of issues greater than conservation alone. For conservationists and natural resource managers, identifying the conservation actions needed to establish MPA networks can be a difficult process, but including concerns outside their immediate sphere of experience can be even more challenging and complex. This is where this report comes in. It seeks to capture emerging international best practice on the full range of considerations needed to build such networks.

The following considerations are essential to developing successful MPA networks:

- ❑ eight ecological criteria of network design;
- ❑ six areas of best practices for establishing networks;
- ❑ four broader considerations to help successfully embed MPA networks within a wider social context; and
- ❑ five key elements to make MPA networks happen and achieve their goals.

Key aspects of building MPA networks



Many of these issues are highly inter-related, but have been separated out in this report for ease of description and communication. Issues such as the need for public education and political will are pertinent throughout the process of establishing MPA networks. No sequence or hierarchy is implied; in fact, all elements included in this report are seen as fundamental to implementing MPA networks. The emphasis on particular issues will change, depending on the individual circumstances of each region or country.

This summary is intended to help:

- ❑ politicians, policy advisors and decisions makers who have a role in ensuring that policy commitments to establish MPA networks become a reality;
- ❑ the donor community supporting work on MPA networks in assessing the importance of proposals;
- ❑ planners, managers and other practitioners at regional, national and local levels who implement MPA networks to set their actions within a broader comprehensive setting; and
- ❑ international organizations, especially regional seas conventions, who act as enabling bodies for implementing agreed commitments to deliver MPA networks.

From this work, three things are clear:

- ❑ no single strategy can succeed in all circumstances; rather, network designers must consider and draw from a broad matrix of inter-related elements;
- ❑ MPA networks need to be more than just lines on maps; managers need to make a real difference by sustaining or recovering wildlife and ecosystem processes; and
- ❑ work on building networks should start now if we are to accomplish the 2012 goal and achieve meaningful conservation benefits worldwide.

This summary and the full technical report are intended to provide designers and managers with a solid framework for beginning the process. But strategies for individual networks will need to evolve over time.

We hope that this document will improve people's understanding of what it takes to build successful MPA networks. We also hope that it will guide the entities involved in building the capacity they needed to deliver such networks. Without question, MPA networks can provide enormous benefits to the ocean environment, to communities and to nations. But none of this will happen unless people commit the practical and political resources to start now.



WHY DO WE NEED MPA NETWORKS?

The best available scientific information tells us that, to protect biodiversity and manage resources, we must establish representative MPA networks across 20 to 30 percent of our seas and oceans. These networks may have different uses and levels of protection within them, but all should include reserves or no-take areas and should include representative examples of the different ecosystems, habitats and communities in our seas and oceans.

Yet most countries and regions have only just started to develop small MPAs, and many have only one or a few MPAs. It is unrealistic to expect that building MPA networks can be achieved in a single step. Instead, planners should expect to develop a gradual strategy for implementing a full network.

In the beginning, countries and regions may want to focus on developing a few well-managed MPAs that benefit local communities. These areas can be used to model the benefits of the larger network for decision makers and the public at large. At all times, however, MPA networks must be viewed realistically and in context; they cannot solve broader deficiencies in ocean governance or management.

What is an mpa 'network'?

An MPA network is an organized collection of individual sites, designed to link individual areas and to comprehensively represent the region's spectrum of marine life characteristics. International commitments to MPA networks recognize that they fulfill ecological and social aims that a single MPA alone cannot. Given the difficulty of coordinating actions among many countries at once, a global system of MPAs will most likely consist of national and regional networks distributed across the globe. An MPA network can therefore be defined as:

A collection of individual marine protected areas operating cooperatively and synergistically, at various spatial scales, and with a range of protection levels, in order to fulfil ecological aims more effectively and comprehensively than individual sites could alone. The network will also display social and economic benefits, though the latter may only become fully developed over long time frames as ecosystems recover.

Areas with full protection – that is, areas where no extractive activities such as fishing or the removal of resources are permitted – should be part of every network. These areas act as benchmarks for assessing the state of the environment and the success of management regimes; they also contribute significantly to the recovery and protection of marine ecosystems. The proportion of fully protected areas versus less strictly protected areas within a network will depend on the degree of protection and recovery being sought and the level of decline in an area's marine resources.

Why are mpa networks important for sustainable development?

MPA networks contribute to sustainable development goals by fostering integrated ocean and coastal management.

- ❑ **Ecologically.** A network can help to ensure marine ecosystem function by encompassing the temporal and spatial scales at which ecological systems operate.
- ❑ **Socially.** A network can help resolve and manage conflicts in the use of natural resources and ensure that reasonable uses can occur with minimal conflict.
- ❑ **Economically.** A network facilitates the efficient use of resources by preventing duplication of effort, such as when small, individual areas attempt to maintain their own management resources.

Representative networks of MPAs – those that contain examples of all habitats and ecological communities of a given area – also provide a cost-effective means of safeguarding large-scale processes while delivering local benefits. Networks can also help reduce the degradation of coastal and marine habitats, slow the loss of endangered marine species, and restore depleted fisheries.



WHAT ARE THE ECOLOGICAL DESIGN CRITERIA FOR MPA NETWORKS?

These eight criteria can help identify the ecological considerations that lie at the heart of designing MPA networks:

Representativeness. MPA networks should represent the range of marine and coastal biological diversity (from genes to ecosystems) and the associated physical environment within the given area.

Replication. All habitats in each region should be replicated within the network and distributed spatially throughout the network.

Viability. MPA networks should incorporate self-sustaining, geographically dispersed component sites of sufficient extent to ensure population persistence through natural cycles of variation. These sites should be independent (as far as possible) of activities in surrounding areas.

Precautionary design. Network designers should base their decisions on the best information currently available, rather than delaying the process to await more and better information. Where information is limited, designers should adopt a precautionary approach.

Permanence. Network design must provide long-term protection to effectively conserve diversity and replenish resources.

Maximum connectivity. MPA network design should seek to maximize and enhance the linkages among individual MPAs, groups of MPAs within a given eco-region, or networks in the same and/or different regions.

Resilience. MPA networks must be designed to maintain ecosystems' natural states and to absorb shocks, particularly in the face of large-scale and long-term changes (such as climate change).

Size and shape. Individual MPA units within the network must be of sufficient size to minimize adverse impacts from activities outside the protected area (avoiding what is called the “edge effect”).

The scale of benefits derived from individual MPAs will depend on their location, design, size, and relationship to other forms of management. MPA networks magnify the benefits of individual sites and protect the large-scale processes that maintain healthy populations, such as connectivity, gene flow and genetic variation.





WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING MPA NETWORKS?

By following the key best practices below during network design and development, planners can create networks that achieve maximum environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Clearly define network objectives.

At the very outset, designers must clearly define objectives in three broad areas:

- ❑ Ecological objectives seek to protect, manage and/or restore marine ecosystems and their components;
- ❑ Economic objectives determine how the region will benefit from the network, and who may suffer negative economic impacts;
- ❑ Socio-cultural objectives include the full range of benefits that biodiversity provides, especially those that directly affect human health and well-being. The lead organization should work to ensure that all MPA network objectives are determined through an open, transparent and balanced process involving users, industry, government representatives, and other groups with an interest in the area. Timetables for achieving targets and milestones should be appropriate, realistic and err on the side of caution.

Establish long-term political commitment and will.

Political commitment and will must be established early in the process and maintained throughout. In some regions, the political will and resources needed to implement all components of a network may already exist. But in most cases, implementing an MPA network will take time, as political will and commitment

for the network and component sites build. The more aware elected officials are of the planning process and of community support, the more they will support the network during planning, implementation and beyond.

In some parts of the world, legal frameworks are often the only way to ensure consistency or to avoid the concept of a “paper park”—that is, a park that has been announced or designated, but not truly implemented. Voluntary support can be susceptible to changes in political priorities; these changes can force governments to focus on short-term gains at the expense of longer-term and wider benefits for society as a whole.

Encourage stakeholder participation.

Developing effective MPA networks requires involving relevant stakeholders from the very beginning. Engaging stakeholders enhances information exchange, fosters the accountability of experts and authorities, reduces mistrust in the decision-making process, and enables stakeholder groups to collaborate and find mutually acceptable solutions. An open, participatory process also fosters a sense of ownership and accomplishment among the groups involved, thereby strengthening support and political will for the MPA network. Timely, planned consultation processes operating at meaningful spatial scales are critical to success. These include indigenous community meetings led by traditional leaders, government-sponsored opportunities for information sharing and comment, or inter-governmental planning meetings.

Make best use of available information.

Rather than waiting for perfect data, involved parties must use the best information available for gap analysis, planning and decision making. This information should not only consist of scientific and socio-economic data, it should include traditional and local ecological knowledge—the knowledge that

indigenous and local groups have gained about an area’s ecology, accumulated by experience and passed through generations. New data that emerges during or after the planning process can be applied through adaptive management. Delaying design and implementation rarely, if ever, benefits marine conservation.

Develop integrated management frameworks.

It is important to establish a hierarchy of planning and management scales, ranging from national planning frameworks to regional and local coordination, to local planning and site planning. A spatially based planning system will help coordinate and improve management; separate conflicting uses; and ensure appropriate spatial allowances for industry, wildlife and healthy ecosystems. When ecological boundaries are not consistent with jurisdictional or political boundaries, planners can help ensure consistency across jurisdictions by creating management strategies that mirror each other in most aspects, such as rules and regulations, but still retain unique jurisdictional aspects.

Employ adaptive management techniques.

“Adaptive management” means using the best available information to develop the MPA network and creating monitoring and evaluation systems to test the effectiveness of management methods and refine them over time. Adaptive management empowers managers to assess the success of their efforts and to adapt their methods as conditions and knowledge change.

Adaptive management can be used to improve management capacity and effectiveness, particularly through professional development programs for network managers and staff. Capacity building also leverages opportunities to attract and provide additional expertise, resources and technology to the MPA.



WHAT ARE THE BROADER CONSIDERATIONS NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT MPA NETWORKS ARE SET IN CONTEXT?

To help ensure the success of MPA networks, designers must also reflect on:

Economic and social considerations:

❑ **Integrate the network into the economic and socio-cultural setting and promote activities that maximize positive benefits.** Planners need to identify the broad costs and benefits provided by effectively managed MPA networks, as well as the indirect and opportunity costs incurred by people living in and around protected areas. One tool for making these calculations is economic valuation of consumptive and non-consumptive activities and non-use values, such as those provided by ecosystem services. Current social relationships and aspirations, cultural traditions and values, and political processes that influence attitudes and decisions about coastal and marine resource use and protection are also important considerations.

❑ **Evaluate the economies of scale provided by networks, as well as the costs of inaction.** Network planners should consider the increased benefits and economies of scale when moving from an individual MPA to a network of MPAs, as well as the costs of inaction – that is, of not creating a network. For example, MPA networks may provide value-added benefits over individual MPAs, such as increased ecosystem services and reduced management costs per unit area.

Spatial and temporal considerations reflect the fact that ecosystems function at different scales and change over time due to factors such as human activities or climate change. Planners should:

❑ **Take actions to address ecological processes, resources and impacts that extend beyond network boundaries or influence MPA networks.** Network design must account for connectivity within and between networks, as well as the impacts of activities outside network boundaries, including upstream areas such as catchments. Given the fluid nature of the ocean environment, network planners must apply all available information on biological, chemical, and physical linkages—within the network and beyond.

❑ **Address the concept of “shifting baselines” in network design.** The “shifting baseline syndrome” is the failure of managers and decision makers to fully grasp the enormous changes that have occurred in ocean ecosystems because they have occurred gradually over many years. Managers often fail to see that their baseline already represents a disturbed state. Therefore, it is especially important that planners set historically appropriate objectives for the MPA network.

Scientific and information management considerations. Science and information play fundamental roles in planning and implementing MPA networks. Yet managers must do more than apply available information; they must seek new information that is pertinent to management and create mechanisms for gathering such information. Network planners and managers should:

❑ **Develop and employ appropriate scientific skills, tools, training and partnerships to design and systematically monitor MPA networks.** Planners can address this in a number of ways: by setting research priorities and training requirements based on management needs; by creating auditing science programs that seek to assess and optimize results; and/or by incorporating end-user and manager input into multi-annual scientific work programs.

❑ **Ensure standardization, synthesis, storage and access to information across and among MPA networks.** Information on individual MPAs may be scattered across institutions and /or individuals. Planners should foster coordination among institutions, develop information archives and create mechanisms for ensuring broad access to information. Such systems should be actively managed and should provide relevant historical data as well as current scientific knowledge.

Institutional and governance considerations.

Institutional and governance arrangements can have a significant effect on network design and management. In some cases, these institutional arrangements have taken shape over many years and were devised to meet the demands of the time, rather than the need for developing representative and effectively managed MPA networks or meeting sustainability objectives. Network planners and managers should, therefore:

❑ **Develop and maintain effective coordination and linkages across sectors and jurisdictions.** Government agencies often fail to coordinate their marine-based activities, resulting in a divided and insular management approach aligned with sector-based laws. This can mean duplication of effort, failure to address cumulative impacts and a poor outcome

for the environment. This complexity is often exacerbated by the fact that government agencies may have different-and even opposing-mandates.

❑ **Develop the legal authorities and institutional frameworks needed to deliver MPA networks.**

Where agency responsibilities and authorities overlap, participants will need to clarify responsibilities or elect one of the parties to play a leadership role. Effective coordination across agencies requires sustained leadership, either by one agency or a specially formed committee or council that can coordinate overlapping and complex jurisdictional arrangements. Complementary and/or consistent legal and institutional frameworks can help resolve inconsistencies where jurisdictions or institutional responsibilities overlap.

❑ **Clarify the legal framework for developing MPA networks.** Many countries have special or single-purpose legislation enabling individual MPAs, and often a variety of agencies share responsibilities for these areas. Only a few have legislative or institutional arrangements that provide a comprehensive basis for an MPA network. A poorly integrated array of legal and institutional responsibilities can lead to problems such as competing mandates, overlaps, gaps and inefficiencies.

❑ **Recognize that the diversity and capacity of the institutions and other groups involved in developing MPA networks can influence the network's efficacy.** It is rare for a single agency to have complete authority over a comprehensive MPA network. To develop effective arrangements for MPA governance, planners must consider the environmental and ecological circumstances, the cultural and socio-political context, and the economic and logistical aspects of management.

Creating an MPA network can proceed only as quickly as the institutions and individuals responsible for key functions develop the skills and attributes needed to manage the network and its component MPAs well. Frequently, existing organizations will need to take on new and different roles; sometimes, entirely new institutions will need to be created to oversee or coordinate activities at the network level.

❑ **Promote trans-boundary MPA networks as instruments for shared management, conservation and cooperation.** Ecosystems, habitats and species rarely correspond to political or jurisdictional boundaries. Therefore, they require cooperative management among states, regions, nations, and jurisdictions. Trans-boundary protected areas, those that straddle the boundaries of jurisdiction and sovereignty and often involve high-level political initiatives, represent one strategy for cooperative management.



WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS NEEDED TO MAKE MPA NETWORKS HAPPEN AND ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS?

Political will and leadership

Political support is fundamentally important throughout the process of developing an MPA network. Public participation and political support are inter-related and are critical to achieving significant and lasting marine conservation outcomes. To successfully implement a network, designers must remain aware of the political environment at every step.

Many scientists and marine managers may not have an adequate level of political savvy, nor do they have the appropriate political contacts. In such instances, planners and managers will need to be creative in finding contacts to ensure the participation of political leaders. Moreover, some conservation objectives may be politically untenable, so planners must be prepared to forge compromises in order to make progress.



Public education, communication and awareness

Education and outreach can enhance people’s attitudes, behaviors, understanding of, and appreciation for, MPA networks. Education programs can address specific resource management issues, help achieve management objectives and promote other essential services such as research, monitoring and enforcement.

In developing a communication plan, designers and managers must first identify key audiences, including managing agencies, as well as local stakeholders and even traditional site users or owners.

Education and outreach efforts may focus on the unique natural and cultural resources of each component MPA. But they must also be part of a larger strategy for the network, ensuring that the objectives of component MPAs are consistent with the network as a whole. A communication plan should also strengthen communication between and among networks, promoting global cooperation and understanding.

Monitoring and assessment

Monitoring and assessment allows managers to determine whether progress is being made towards network objectives and goals. It is also crucial to a successful adaptive management approach (see Best Practice 4.6, above). Systematic monitoring builds a base of knowledge to improve decision making, and positive results can increase the support of target groups, whether they be stakeholders or other relevant parties.

To be truly beneficial monitoring and assessment structures must be built into MPA networks from the very outset. They should include sites outside the network, creating a system of controls against which overall performance can be assessed.

Information derived from ongoing monitoring can help MPA managers to secure political support, justify requests for additional staff or funding, and build stakeholder support. Moreover, successful evaluation strategies in one area can also serve as effective models for other areas in the network and beyond.

Sustainable financing

Creating and maintaining representative, effectively managed networks of MPAs requires substantial funding from local, national, regional and even international entities (e.g. Global Environment Facility and other donors). A financially sustainable MPA network should be able to meet, on a continuing basis, the minimum level of recurrent and investment costs needed to achieve its conservation objectives.

Individual MPAs are frequently supported by ad hoc, short-term or piecemeal funding. MPA networks introduce a new level of complexity and a need to share resources among protected areas and institutions, some of which may depend on other areas in the network-and indeed on areas not formally protected-to sustain critical functions, habitats, and resources. Even with major initiatives to mobilize financing for MPA networks, resources will be limited relative to the challenge. Network designers and managers must therefore ensure that funds are used cost-effectively.

What are the key elements of a successful financing strategy?

Sound financing strategies consist of four main elements.



❑ **Sharing costs and management responsibilities.**

Many of the investments and recurrent expenditures needed to sustain MPA networks can be shared by building local support for network objectives. Alternatively, they may be assumed by communities, NGOs, private businesses, or others with a relevant interest, or funding leveraged from local governments for activities that benefit communities in or near protected areas.

❑ **Building diverse portfolios.**

Resilient financing strategies comprise diverse portfolios of complementary revenue sources and cost-effective management approaches. Sources may include government funds, grants from private foundations and non-governmental organizations, and endowment funds.

❑ **Administrative and governance systems.**

Funding for MPA networks must be channeled effectively to activities on the ground; this is vital in building local confidence in, and support for, individual networks. To help secure long-term funding, network designers must create mechanisms to track and report spending with a high degree of accountability.

❑ **Political support for implementation.**

Generating broad-based political support – among government agencies and key stakeholders – is as essential for securing revenue sources as it is for ensuring the governance systems and policies needed to build MPA networks. Wherever possible, planning and budgeting for MPA networks should be incorporated into regular government processes and sustainable development strategies.

How do you create sustainable financing strategies for MPA networks?

As a country begins to scale up from individual MPAs to MPA networks, it may not be sufficient to simply expand or replicate mechanisms that have worked for specific MPAs. Financing strategies at the network level will involve trade-offs, such as retaining income at specific sites versus pooling resources for the network overall.

Here are some steps that governments, communities, NGOs, businesses, donors, and others should take to help determine their own strategies for achieving financial sustainability:

- ❑ Conduct cost-benefit analyses of the MPA network, set within the broader land and ocean area.
- ❑ Include the potential for generating resources or for creating partnerships as an explicit criterion for selecting which MPAs or areas should make up a network.
- ❑ Clearly identify MPA network objectives and the activities essential to meeting them, and seek funding sources and partnerships that are compatible with those ends.
- ❑ Identify existing and potential funding sources and ways to reduce or share management costs.
- ❑ Develop a strategy that includes diverse finance mechanisms and management approaches.
- ❑ Identify management (including collaborative management), accountability, and oversight arrangements needed to generate and allocate resources efficiently.

Compliance and enforcement

“Compliance” is when people voluntarily accept and act in accord with the rules and regulations of the MPA network. “Enforcement” is the action taken against those people who fail to abide by the rules. Network planners must make it more profitable and preferable for the public to comply with the MPA network regulations than not to comply. Enforcement across an MPA network allows for economies of scale. Aerial surveys, for example, are more cost effective when employed across an MPA network as opposed to a single MPA.

Education and compliance should be the first option, and enforcement, the last resort. Both depend on the legal and judicial support of the national government. However, compliance strategies must match the economic and socio-cultural context of the MPA network. The following actions will help ensure effective compliance and enforcement.

- ❑ **Build in compliance and enforcement considerations at the MPA network planning stage.** Primary considerations include feasibility, affordability, public understanding and protecting areas most vulnerable to impact from human activities.
- ❑ **Educate to build compliance.** To ensure compliance, managers must educate policy makers and government leaders, as well as citizens, about the MPA network and why regulations are needed. Gaining public support for laws can contribute to “cooperative enforcement,” whereby citizens themselves willingly help to enforce rules.
- ❑ **Develop surveillance programs to support compliance and enforcement.** “Surveillance” entails monitoring people’s activities within the MPA network to ensure that they follow the rules. Some new technologies can increase the efficiency of enforcement while requiring less manpower. Agreements among nations, government agencies, local communities and resource users can help to mobilize resources that are already available.
- ❑ **Enforcement should be supported by appropriate penalties.** In order to foster compliance and ease enforcement, regulations and penalties must be clear, understandable, and appropriate to the socio-cultural context of the network. Penalties can range from a public verbal reprimand to confiscating property, suspending a license, or prosecution.

THE NEXT STEPS

This report is intended to demonstrate how to transform policy aspirations into practical action. In compiling it, we employed global experience and knowledge to inspire countries to plan carefully and to build their capacity for developing effective MPA networks. We did not intend to be exhaustive, but to describe the key areas where countries need to make practical progress now and in the future.

Because of the complex mix of social, ecological and economic issues involved, building MPA networks takes time. The aim of this report is to provide clear and straightforward advice on this issue without denying those complexities.

This work also raises some important issues beyond developing MPA networks, which must be addressed through other means, including better management of industries such as fisheries and tourism and improved pollution control.

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