The Graphic Guide to Marine Protected Areas

How to define, track, and improve ocean protection
Some MPAs or MPA zones allow almost all types of extraction. While other MPAs or MPA zones prohibit all types of extraction.

Different types of MPAs have different outcomes for people and nature. The MPA Guide clarifies what can be expected from different levels and stages of protection.

For example, when does “protection” begin?

Does it begin when a government or other managing authority approves the creation of an MPA in law?

Or does it begin at the point at which measures are put in place with on-the-water management?

And what exactly does “protection” mean?

This confusion interferes with clear accounting and decisions.

But the term “protected area” refers to so many different types of protection that it leads to confusion.

Areas in the ocean that are managed over the long term primarily for the conservation of habitats and species.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (or MPAs)

are a key tool for ocean conservation and management. Here’s a simple explanation:

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Stage of Establishment

Establishment of an MPA can take years. Biodiversity is not safeguarded until the MPA is implemented and enforced. The MPA Guide recognizes four stages in this process.

- **PROPOSED/COMMITTED**
  - The intent to create an MPA is made public.

- **DESIGNATED**
  - The MPA is dedicated through legally recognized means or authoritative rule and now exists in law or other formal process.

- **IMPLEMENTED**
  - The MPA now exists on the water with boundaries, a plan for management, and effective enforcement in place.

- **ACTIVELY MANAGED**
  - The MPA has monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management.

Level of Protection

The MPA Guide recognizes four levels of protection of biodiversity from extractive and destructive activities. These protection levels can be for the entire MPA or in a specific MPA zone. Effective design, compliance and enforcement are essential for each level.

- **MINIMALLY PROTECTED**
  - Impacts of extraction and other activities may be large but the area still provides some conservation benefit.

- **LIGHTLY PROTECTED**
  - Some protection exists but also allows uses with moderate extraction and impact.

- **HIGHLY PROTECTED**
  - Only very light extraction is allowed, and all abatable impacts are minimized to protect biodiversity.

- **FULLY PROTECTED**
  - No extractive or destructive activities are allowed, and all abatable impacts are minimized to best protect biodiversity.
Using these two metrics, we can talk about all MPAs with clarity and transparency.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF PROTECTION</th>
<th>STAGE OF ESTABLISHMENT</th>
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<td>Minimally Protected</td>
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Each successive stage of establishment is an important milestone in achieving conservation outcomes, but no actual conservation benefit is realized until the MPA is implemented.

Then, the more fully protected and actively managed an area is, the better the conservation outcomes.

The Level of Protection and Stage of Establishment determine conservation and social benefits of an MPA.

A Fully Protected and Actively Managed MPA is expected to result in recovery of previously exploited species and habitats, stronger potential for carbon storage and adaptation to climate and other environmental changes, and greater opportunities for livelihoods that depend upon a healthy ecosystem.

These benefits do not begin to appear until the protection is implemented.

And an MPA with minimal protection may include significant human use, but is expected to deliver fewer conservation benefits.

The bottom line: The MPA Guide helps unify the tracking of MPAs. It also guides choices about the level of protection needed to achieve goals.
Not all MPAs are the same. Use The MPA Guide to identify the best type of MPA to achieve your goals for biodiversity and people.

Effective MPAs help build healthy oceans for generations to come.

Sources:


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