

**SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON
MARINE RESERVES
AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

Annual Meeting of the American Association For the Advancement of the Sciences
(AAAS)
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THE CONTEXT

At the 1997 Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), a symposium on marine protected areas reviewed the state of the oceans, raised a number of unresolved critical scientific issues and identified research priorities. In response, an international team of scientists was convened at the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) and charged with developing better scientific understanding of marine protected areas and marine reserves. Conclusions from the two-and-a-half-year efforts of this working group are in press in a special issue of the journal *Ecological Applications*. This Scientific Consensus Statement is based upon those results and other research already published elsewhere. The Statement is a joint effort of the NCEAS scientists and the academic scientists participating in a meeting on marine reserves convened by COMPASS (Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea). This Statement was drafted in response to repeated requests by many fishermen, marine resource managers, governmental officials, conservation activists, interested citizens and others for a succinct, non-technical but scientifically accurate summary of the current scientific knowledge about marine reserves. Additional information on the history of this Statement, NCEAS and COMPASS appears after the Statement.

New Approaches Are Needed

The declining state of the oceans and the collapse of many fisheries have created a critical need for new and more effective management of marine biodiversity, populations of exploited species and overall health of the oceans. Marine reserves are a highly effective but under-appreciated and under-utilized tool that can help alleviate many of these problems. At present, less than 1% of United States territorial waters and less than 1% of the world's oceans are protected in reserves.

What are Marine Reserves?

Marine Reserves (MRVs) are areas of the sea completely protected from all extractive activities. Within a reserve, all biological resources are protected through prohibitions on fishing and the removal or disturbance of any living or non-living marine resource, except as necessary for monitoring or research to evaluate reserve effectiveness. Marine reserves are sometimes called "ecological reserves," "fully-protected marine reserves," or "no-take areas." MRVs are a special category of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). MPAs are areas designated to enhance conservation of marine resources. The actual level of protection within MPAs varies considerably; most allow some extractive activities such as fishing, while prohibiting others such as drilling for oil or gas. A Network of Marine Reserves is a set of MRVs within a biogeographic region, connected by larval dispersal and juvenile or adult migration.

THE SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS

The first formal marine reserves were established more than two decades ago. Recent analyses of the changes occurring within these MRVs allow us to make the following conclusions:

Ecological effects within reserve boundaries:

- Reserves result in long-lasting and often rapid increases in the abundance, diversity and productivity of marine organisms.
- These changes are due to decreased mortality, decreased habitat destruction and to indirect ecosystem effects.
- Reserves reduce the probability of extinction for marine species resident within them.
- Increased reserve size results in increased benefits, but even small reserves have positive effects.
- Full protection (which usually requires adequate enforcement and public involvement) is critical to achieve this full range of benefits. Marine protected areas do not provide the same benefits as marine reserves.

Ecological effects outside reserve boundaries: In the few studies that have examined spillover effects, the size and abundance of exploited species increase in areas adjacent to reserves.

- There is increasing evidence that reserves replenish populations regionally via larval export.

Ecological effects of reserve networks:

There is increasing evidence that a network of reserves buffers against the vagaries of environmental variability and provides significantly greater protection for marine communities than a single reserve. An effective network needs to

- span large geographic distances and
- encompass a substantial area to protect against catastrophes and
- provide a stable platform for the long-term persistence of marine communities.

ANALYSES OF THE BEST AVAILABLE EVIDENCE LEADS US TO CONCLUDE THAT:

- Reserves conserve both fisheries and biodiversity.
- To meet goals for fisheries and biodiversity conservation, reserves must encompass the diversity of marine habitats.
- Reserves are the best way to protect resident species and provide heritage protection to important habitats.
- Reserves must be established and operated in the context of other management tools.
- Reserves need a dedicated program to monitor and evaluate their impacts both within and outside their boundaries.

- Reserves provide a critical benchmark for the evaluation of threats to ocean communities.
- Networks of reserves will be necessary for long-term fishery and conservation benefits.
- Existing scientific information justifies the immediate application of fully protected marine reserves as a central management tool.

SIGNATORIES

This Scientific Consensus Statement is signed by 161 leading marine scientists and experts on marine reserves. Signatories all hold Ph.D. degrees and are employed by academic institutions. Names and affiliations of signatories appear on pages 5 - 12 (Removed from this document)

HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THIS STATEMENT

This Statement was drafted in response to repeated requests by many fishermen, marine resource managers, governmental officials, conservation activists, interested citizens and others for a succinct, non-technical but scientifically accurate summary of the current scientific knowledge about marine reserves.

The Statement is based on work conducted primarily by the NCEAS Working Group on Marine Reserves, co-chaired by Jane Lubchenco, Stephen R. Palumbi and Steven D. Gaines. The National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS - <http://www.nceas.ucsb.edu/>) is a scientific institution funded by the National Science Foundation, the State of California and the University of California, Santa Barbara. The mission of NCEAS is to advance the state of ecological knowledge through the search for general patterns and principles and to organize and synthesize ecological information in a manner useful to researchers, resource managers, and policy makers addressing important environmental issues. The Working Group on Marine Reserves (WGMR) was convened in May 1998 following a Symposium on The Science of Marine Protected Areas at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in February 1997. Products from the Working Group have been published or are in press in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

The initial version of this Scientific Consensus Statement was drafted in August 2000 at a meeting on “The Science and Development of Marine Protected Areas and Fully Protected Marine Reserves along the U.S. West Coast” held in Monterey, California. The meeting was organized and sponsored by COMPASS (<http://www.CompassOnline.org/>), the Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea, a collaboration among Island Press, SeaWeb, Monterey Bay Aquarium and an independent Board of Scientific Experts. The mission of COMPASS is to advance and communicate marine conservation science. Dr. Megan Dethier and Dr. Stephen R. Palumbi coordinated the academic scientist group which drafted the initial Statement at the Monterey COMPASS meeting, following presentations by NCEAS Working Group scientists.

The intended audience for the Statement includes resource users, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and interested citizens. Signatories are academic Ph.D. scientists with expertise relevant to reserves.

For further information about NCEAS, COMPASS, the Statement, a list of scientific products from the NCEAS Working Group on Marine Reserves or to add your name for future use of the Statement, please contact Dr. Patty Debenham pdebenham@nceas.ucsb.edu or Dr. George Leonard gleonard@mbayaq.org.

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Scientists' Statement on Protecting the World's Deep-sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems

http://www.mcabi.org/DSC_statement/sign.htm

As marine scientists and conservation biologists, we are profoundly concerned that human activities, particularly bottom trawling, are causing unprecedented damage to the deep-sea coral and sponge communities on continental plateaus and slopes, and on seamounts and mid-ocean ridges.

Shallow-water coral reefs are sometimes called "the rainforests of the sea" for their extraordinary biological diversity, perhaps the highest anywhere on Earth. However, until quite recently, few people-even marine scientists-knew that the majority of coral species live in colder, darker depths, or that some of these form coral reefs and forests similar to those of shallow waters in appearance, species richness and importance to fisheries. Lophelia coral reefs in cold waters of the Northeast Atlantic have over 1,300 species of invertebrates, and over 850 species of macro- and megafauna were recently found on seamounts in the Tasman and Coral Seas, as many as in a shallow-water coral reef. Because seamounts are essentially undersea islands, many seamount species are endemics-species that occur nowhere else-and are therefore exceptionally vulnerable to extinction. Moreover, marine scientists have observed large numbers of commercially important but increasingly uncommon groupers and redfish among the sheltering structures of deep-sea coral reefs. Finally, because of their longevity, some deep-sea corals can serve as archives of past climate conditions that are important to understanding global climate change. In short, based on current knowledge, deep-sea coral and sponge communities appear to be as important to the biodiversity of the oceans and the sustainability of fisheries as their analogues in shallow tropical seas.

In recent years scientists have discovered deep-sea corals and/or coral reefs in Japan, Tasmania, New Zealand, Alaska, California, Nova Scotia, Maine, North Carolina, Florida, Colombia, Brazil, Norway, Sweden, UK, Ireland and Mauritania. Because research submarines and remotely operated vehicles suitable for studying the deep sea are few and expensive to operate, scientific investigation of these remarkable communities is in its very early stages. But it is increasingly clear that deep-sea corals

usually inhabit places where natural disturbance is rare, and where growth and reproduction appear to be exceedingly slow. Deep-sea corals and sponges may live for centuries, making them and the myriad species that depend on them extremely slow to recover from disturbance.

Unfortunately, just as scientists have begun to understand the diversity, importance and vulnerability of deep-sea coral forests and reefs, humans have developed technologies that profoundly disturb them. There is reason for concern about deep-sea oil and gas development, deep-sea mining and global warming, but, at present, the greatest human threat to coral and sponge communities is commercial fishing, especially bottom trawling. Trawlers are vessels that drag large, heavily weighted nets across the seafloor to catch fishes and shrimps. Scientific studies around the world have shown that trawling is devastating to corals and sponges. As trawlers become more technologically sophisticated, and as fishes disappear from shallower areas, trawling is increasingly occurring at depths exceeding 1,000 meters.

It is not too late to save most of the world's deep-sea coral and sponge ecosystems. We commend nations including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Norway, which have already taken initial steps towards protecting some coral and sponge ecosystems under their jurisdiction. We urge the United Nations and appropriate international bodies to establish a moratorium on bottom trawling on the High Seas. Similarly, we urge individual nations and states to ban bottom trawling to protect deep-sea ecosystems wherever coral forests and reefs are known to occur within their Exclusive Economic Zones. We urge them to prohibit roller and rockhopper trawls and any similar technologies that allow fishermen to trawl on the rough bottoms where deep-sea coral and sponge communities are most likely to occur. We urge them to support research and mapping of vulnerable deep-sea coral and sponge communities. And we urge them to establish effective, representative networks of marine protected areas that include deep-sea coral and sponge communities.