

Notes & News

Indonesia protects local fisheries with seven MPAs

In May, the Indonesian government formally designated a network of seven MPAs in the Raja Ampat archipelago, encompassing 45% of the region's diverse shallow-water ecosystems, including coral reefs and mangroves. The network, totaling 9000 km², is designed to help manage the fisheries of Raja Ampat and maintain food security for the local populace, which holds marine tenure over the reefs. Although site regulations are not yet finalized, there is a general target to set aside 20% of each MPA in no-take zones. Traditional fishing methods will be allowed to continue in the remaining 80% of each MPA.

"The main aim is to stop not only destructive fishing techniques in the region, such as blast and cyanide fishing, but also to greatly restrict commercial fisheries within these sensitive areas," says Mark Erdmann of Conservation International. Erdmann is regional coordinator of a major ecosystem-based management initiative for the 180,000-km² Bird's Head Seascape, which includes Raja Ampat. "The local human population density is low enough in Raja Ampat that the reefs can generally support them," says Erdmann. "The problem right now is the rapid intensification of commercial fisheries in the area that are 100%-focused on fisheries products for markets outside of Raja Ampat, either domestic or international."

Designation of the MPAs by the national government represents a formalization of six sites that local communities had already closed to commercial fishing in late 2006/early 2007. The seventh site in the network is the Raja Ampat Marine Wildlife Sanctuary, which has existed on paper since 1993 but with no management in place.

The Bird's Head Seascape initiative is developing a comprehensive management plan for the region, and is a partnership of The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the World Wide Fund for Nature Indonesia, along with local and national government, stakeholders, and local Papuan NGOs ("Examining the Role of MPAs in Ecosystem-Based Management, and Vice Versa", *MPA News* 8:4). As part of the initiative, a local conservation organization (KONPERS) has established a turtle nest-guarding program inside one of the six new MPAs, utilizing local villagers as rangers. Since the onset of the nest-guarding program in late 2006, the poaching rate has dropped from 95% to 0% at the site, protecting nearly 500 green turtle nests.

For more information

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Website launched to help Pacific Island MPAs share information

Pacific Island nations are located hundreds or thousands of kilometers apart, creating a challenge for MPA managers there to share information with regional peers. The Pacific Islands Marine Protected Areas Community (PIMPAC) is a program designed to help participants bridge that geographic gap, including through regional workshops, staff exchanges, and a forthcoming newsletter and listserv. Coordinated by the Micronesia Conservation Trust and the (US) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, PIMPAC serves the Freely Associated States of the Pacific, US Pacific Islands, and Fiji. The new project website, launched in March, is <http://www.pimpac.org>.

Largest MPA receives new name

The 362,000-km² marine protected area originally known as the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument has a new official name: Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The new name refers to the birth of the Hawaiian Islands archipelago in Native Hawaiian folklore. Directions on how to pronounce the name are online at <http://hawaiireef.noaa.gov/about/welcome.html>.

US President George W. Bush designated the MPA in June 2006 (*MPA News* 8:1). It is larger than the 344,400-km² Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia, which had previously been considered by many to be the world's largest MPA.

IUCN approves guidelines for precautionary principle

The governing body of the IUCN has approved guidelines for applying the precautionary principle in conservation and natural resource management. The precautionary principle provides a fundamental policy basis for anticipating and avoiding threats to the environment: namely, that action to protect the environment may be necessary before scientific certainty of harm is established. The guidelines are based on a prior set of recommendations produced by an international initiative in 2005 (*MPA News* 7:5), and are available online at http://www.iucn.org/themes/law/pdf/documents/LN250507_PPGuidelines.pdf.

Although there are clear legal requirements to apply precaution in an increasing number of specific contexts (e.g., the Rio Declaration, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and several other international agreements), the guidelines do not take a position on whether precaution has become part of international customary law, on which there is ongoing debate.