Ocean Sanctuary Alliance News

January 2020

New Study Produces First Consensus Roadmap For Ocean Protection

Caribbean, Mediterranean, Galapagos, Madagascar and Coral Triangle Are Top Priorities

Important areas in EEZ’s offer the best opportunity to meet 10% goal this year

MARINE AREAS OF CONSENSUS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PROTECTION

The Ocean Sanctuary Alliance (OSA) announces the publication of the largest synthesis of important marine areas conducted to date in the journal Frontiers in Marine Science. This scientific study – the first of its kind-- analyzed 10 UN and NGO maps depicting global marine priority areas. The map above visualizes the results on a global level, with darker shades showing higher levels of consensus on where ocean protection is needed. The study including an online version of the map provides clear direction on how UN Member-states can achieve and surpass the goal of 10% protection.
HOW THE STUDY CAME TO BE

The idea arose after OSA, Italy’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and United Nations Environmental Programme co-convened the Conference on Marine Protected Areas: An Urgent Imperative in Rome on March 7-9, 2016. Diplomats at this conference, through a resulting Call to Action, urged the scientific community to “Map and describe areas where MPAs are especially needed and prioritize protection of vulnerable species and habitats…giving the highest consideration to both biodiversity distribution and ecosystem functioning.”

Discussions following the Rome Conference produced a simple but novel idea: to collate existing global mapping efforts, reveal where there is agreement on priority areas, and calculate the extent of such agreement.

The study, formally titled “Gaps in Protection of Important Ocean Areas: A Spatial Meta-Analysis of Ten Global Mapping Initiatives” was published October 2019. The full text of the paper can be found at https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00650/full

Dr. Ellen Pikitch, Endowed Professor of Ocean Conservation Science within Stony Brook University’s School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences and a board member of OSA, initiated and co-authored the study, which was financed through private donations and a grant from the Italian Ministry of Environment. The goal of the study is to guide the siting of future Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by synthesizing information on ocean regions that have already been identified as important by UN and NGO initiatives.

Dr. Ellen Pikitch
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Images from the March 2016 conference in Rome
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study found that almost every country has an opportunity to increase protection of important ocean areas, and the current goal to protect 10% of the ocean by 2020 could be met solely through the actions of coastal states. Furthermore, if all the unprotected area identified as important by 2 or more initiatives were to be protected by 2020, an additional 9.34% of the ocean would be added to the global MPA network.

Among the principal findings of the paper:

• Over 55% of the ocean was identified as important by at least one study. Nearly 60% of this area is within national jurisdictions, and over 40% is located in the high seas.

• Over 14% of the ocean was identified as important by multiple (2-7) studies, and nearly 90% of this area is currently unprotected.

• The largest important yet unprotected areas identified by multiple studies were located in the Caribbean Sea, Madagascar and the southern tip of Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Coral Triangle in the South Pacific.

• 75% of all exclusive economic zones protect less than 10% of their identified priority areas. This indicates the large extent of immediate opportunities for further ocean protection.

“The window of time to secure a healthy ocean for future generations is short and quickly closing, and action is needed now”

-Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean

EXPLORE IMPORTANT MARINE AREAS WORLD WIDE WITH THE ONLINE MAP

STUDY RESULTS CAN BE VISUALIZED EASILY WITH THIS TOOL

OSA has mapped the ten global initiatives into a single, interactive platform that is accessible online at https://www.somas.stonybrook.edu/research/global-research/macop/

By overlaying these initiatives, the study revealed levels of consensus that are made immediately identifiable by variations in color. Oranges and reds indicate greater agreement among maps. The corresponding number represents how many initiatives are present. Also visible are the boundaries of current MPAs, as designated by the World Database on Protected Areas.

This tool enables scientists, diplomats, policymakers, and others to swiftly identify and prioritize areas where the creation or extension of MPAs ought to be explored. Users can zoom to any EEZ or body of water in a matter of seconds and view global to hyperlocal extents. The many functions of this map are described in an instructional YouTube video that is linked within the platform.

The maps that follow are screenshots from the online platform, which highlight specific regions of high consensus.
Madagascar and Southwest Indian Ocean Region

The area around Madagascar and the Southwest Indian Ocean emerged as a key result of the study. Darker colors represent higher levels of agreement, grey borders represent Exclusive Economic Zone boundaries, and green areas represent current MPAs. Madagascar, Tanzania, Mozambique, Comoros, Seychelles, and Mauritius all contain areas that have been identified as important but that are unprotected. Refined images of the region can be found at https://www.somas.stonybrook.edu/research/global-research/macop/
Coral Triangle Region

Many areas of marine importance lie in the Coral Triangle region. Below is a screenshot of the study results in this region, further detail can be found at https://www.somas.stonybrook.edu/research/global-research/macop/. While some of the current MPAs in this region are of modest or even large size, most protected areas are small and do not contain areas of high value that are identified in the study. Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Philippines, Timor Leste and Malaysia have good opportunities for MPA creation and expansion.
The Ocean Sanctuary Alliance was formed in 2014 as a not-for-profit platform engaging Member states, scientists, business and civil society committed to ocean preservation in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Prior to the 2030 Agenda adoption in 2015, OSA successfully advocated at the UN for the adoption of a stand-alone goal devoted to the Ocean, and fought to include the only measurable goal in SDG14: Target 5 of SDG 14: By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law, and based on the best available scientific information.

OSA organizes meetings and symposia bringing diplomats and scientists together to explore solutions for the oceans. OSA also initiates and funds scientific research designed to promote the effective implementing of new ocean sanctuaries.

The Ocean Sanctuary Alliance was honored to present the outcomes of the study to the Group of Friends of the Oceans and Seas at a meeting hosted by the Permanent Mission of Monaco to the United Nations and chaired by Ambassador Isabelle Picco. The meeting also discussed ways to accelerate progress in achieving 10% marine protected areas by 2020 as well as the possibility of setting new targets for 2030.

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Region around the Galapagos Islands

The Galapagos Islands had the highest level of agreement found in the study—seven of the ten maps found this area to be of high ecological value. These results support expanding the geographic scope of the current Galapagos MPAs to include surrounding waters. Peru, Colombia, mainland Ecuador, Panama, and Costa Rica (EEZ shown) also have good opportunities to protect new identified areas, and expand upon existing small MPAs.