

Marine Protected Areas Fact File

Why do we need to protect the ocean?

The ocean provides us with many resources that we use in our daily lives, from food and medicine to fuel and electricity. With a growing population, the demand on ocean resources is increasing. These resources aren't limitless and harvesting them can cause damage to marine ecosystems.



How can we manage and protect the ocean?

To ensure a healthy ocean for the future, we must reduce habitat damage, harvest our ocean's resources sustainably and protect vital ecosystems. We can protect ocean resources through legislation and laws, restoration projects and marine protected areas.



What are Marine Protected Areas?

The terminology

Marine Protected Area (or MPA) is a catch-all term that describes an area of sea where marine species and/or habitats are protected.

In the UK, MPAs include Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), Special Protected Areas (SPAs), Special Areas for Conservation (SACs), and others. A fully protected marine area or 'marine reserve' are the strictest form of MPA.



What do they do?

MPAs protect specific species or whole habitats through reducing destructive activity. In most MPAs only certain activities are banned, whereas in fully protected marine areas all damaging activities are banned.



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What are the benefits?



MPAs can provide a safe area for habitats and species to recover and thrive



Fully protected marine areas have been shown to not only increase biodiversity in an area, but also to increase the quantity and size of species



Unlike on land there are no real boundaries in the ocean, which means that the abundance of life in an MPA can 'spill out' and benefit neighbouring areas



It is estimated that within Europe for every €1 invested into MPAs, there could be a return of €3 due to the value of the services they provide (1)



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Eelgrass bed
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Balancing act

Marine Protected Areas are set up to protect wildlife and habitats, but the views of local communities and economic activities in the area also need to be considered. There are many stakeholders with conflicting opinions, like governments, commercial industries (e.g. oil & gas, shipping, marine aggregates) large and small-scale fishers, ministry of defence, environmental NGOs, scientific community, tourist industries and coastal inhabitants.

The ocean is a vast space and managing activities is logistically and financially difficult.