

2.0 Introduction

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are in use throughout the world for a variety of purposes. In the U.S., numerous agencies have established MPAs to achieve a variety of objectives. Their sizes, shapes, and purposes are as diverse as their designations. National marine sanctuaries, fishery management zones, national seashores, national parks, national monuments, critical habitats, national wildlife refuges, national estuarine research reserves, state conservation areas, state reserves, and local parks perform as sites for research and education, as biodiversity reserves, as tools to conserve historic or cultural marine resources, as designations to reduce user conflicts, and to manage natural resources.

The federal government's MPA program defines marine protected areas as "any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by Federal, State, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein" (E.O. 13158, Federal Register, 2000).

Ocean resource managers at a variety of levels in the U.S. are considering MPAs to accomplish targeted objectives, including recovery of depleted fish populations. Fishery management councils are examining and debating the use of MPAs as fishery management tools. As program managers in National Marine Sanctuaries perform their periodic reviews and evaluations, no-take MPAs are being proposed as management measures in sanctuary management plans. State managers in Florida and Oregon are grappling with the effects of MPA designations on activities they manage in state waters, and in California a state law has mandated the development of a comprehensive system of MPAs throughout state waters.

Each proposed line on a chart, every suggested change or curtailment of human activity in the marine environment, engages user groups, managers, and scientists in the debate over the purpose, effectiveness, and evaluation of MPAs as a resource management tool. The process is never without controversy, highlighting the need for improved designation procedures, including more concrete criteria for MPA design and implementation.

During the past few years, federal and state agencies have undertaken public planning processes to create new MPAs or to establish fully protected marine reserves within existing MPAs. In each case, agencies sought public input on the design, location and management plan for new MPAs. Approaches used to acquire stakeholder input varied widely depending on agency-specific legal requirements, policies, timelines and other constraints. Public engagement in these very different planning processes ranged from sustained substantive involvement over several years, to more limited participation focused mainly on commenting on internally generated preliminary plans. The results of these MPA planning efforts varied as widely as their methods.

Constructive public engagement in MPA planning is vital to achieving conservation goals: both in establishing sites and in ensuring their effective long-term stewardship. Conversely, when MPA planning processes go awry, the resulting confusion and controversy can result in compromises on siting and levels of protection that do not comport with MPA objectives, and can complicate objective assessment of future unrelated MPA proposals in other settings.

To evaluate the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in six recent federal and state MPA planning processes around the U.S., the National MPA Center initiated the MPA Lessons Learned Project to critically examine from a variety of perspectives what worked well, as well as what did not, and to make recommendations for future approaches to this fundamentally important phase of MPAs. A first phase

was publication of Marine Protected Area Process Review: Case Studies of Five MPA Establishment Processes, which can be viewed on line at http://www.mpa.gov/information_tools/lessons_learned.html. (NOAA 2003). The first phase was an objective documentation of five recent MPA establishment procedures, which specific process-related elements outlined for each. The present report examines the same cases from the perspective of stakeholders who participated in the planning and designation processes.

2.1 Report structure

This project uses a case study approach to provide raw material and insights for an evaluation of several planning processes. Although the evaluation focuses on past experience, the report intends to be constructive and prospective, leading to improvements to stakeholder participation processes in order to create more effective MPAs.

In particular, the Lessons Learned Project evaluates the effectiveness of, and perceptions of key participants in, six planning processes to establish MPAs. The case study sites were chosen by the MPA Center for their geographic range, variation in governmental authorities involved, and different modes of stakeholder participation.

The six processes examined were:

- Northwest Straits National Marine Sanctuary / San Juan County bottomfish recovery zones (federal/state/local; Washington state)
- The Channel Islands Marine Reserve (federal/state; off Santa Barbara, California)
- California's Marine Life Protection Act: Phase I (state; throughout California state waters)
- Tortugas Ecological Reserve (federal/state; Florida Keys)
- Gulf of Mexico Grouper Closures (federal/FMC (Fishery Management Council); Florida Gulf coast)
- Carl N. Schuster Horseshoe Crab Reserve (multi-state/federal; Delaware Bay)

Each case study includes a brief description of the historic management or policy setting, examines the specific case facts in light of the project's core questions, and extracts lessons learned. A synthesis of all the lessons is pulled together in a Summary of Findings (Section 6.0), that also includes recommendations on a variety of topics related to process design, process management, decision making, and evaluation.

2.2 A note about terminology

Executive Order 13158 defines marine protected area as “any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein.” In this report, however, each case study uses the terminology adopted by that particular process, and is not based on a consistent definition. For example, some case studies used the term “marine reserve” in reference to areas that are completely no-take, while others used the term in reference to areas that have limited take. In another example, some sites preferred to use the term “consumptive use,” while others preferred the term “extractive use.” Definitions of terms are incorporated in each case study as appropriate.

A list of acronyms used in the report is provided in Appendix A.