



## UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement    Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente  
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде    برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

联合国环境规划署



**UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 8 June 2009, 0900 GMT**

### **The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, UK**

#### **A new on-line system to view and study the world's marine protected areas**

**8 June 2009, Cambridge** – At a time when the world's oceans are facing unprecedented pressures from human impacts in the marine environment, a new decision-making tool is being launched to provide the most current and relevant information about marine and coastal biodiversity and its protection status.

This marine protected areas tool ([www.wdpa-marine.org](http://www.wdpa-marine.org)), created by the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), is part of the recently redeveloped World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) – the authoritative and most globally comprehensive list of marine and terrestrial protected areas.

“Marine protected areas are critical to the future of the oceans and they will ensure that the ecosystem services on which millions of people around the world rely for their livelihoods and existence will be maintained,” explained Kristian Teleki, Head of the One Ocean Programme and Director of the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) at UNEP-WCMC. “Without Marine Protected Areas and the efforts of governments, conservation organisations and communities around the world to manage and conserve the marine environment, the future of the oceans and the diversity of life contained within them will be jeopardized.”

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are locations which receive protection because of their environmental, scenic or socio-economic value. Although some countries have marine protected areas, these vary considerably in size and designation from country to country, depending on national needs and priorities, and on differences in legislative, institutional and financial support. MPAs cover different marine and coastal environments from shallow coastal waters to the deepest sea, from polar oceans to tropical seas and often span national boundaries. When combined with other conservation measures such as spatial planning and ecosystem-based management, these areas can be very effective.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said: “Currently somewhere around 12 per cent of the land is held in protected areas, but less than one per cent of the marine environment has been given such status - so this needs to change, and to change fast too. It is our hope that the WDPA-Marine will help nations redress this imbalance and that in the next decade we will have achieved significant progress in protecting the seas through MPAs.”

The WDPA-Marine serves as the data source for the marine protected area layer of Google Ocean through UNEP-WCMC's partnership with IUCN and the marine theme of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA).

"Obtaining and promoting accurate information on marine protected areas is a top priority. I am therefore delighted on World Oceans Day that we are launching WDPA – Marine as another critical tool alongside Protect Planet Ocean and Google Ocean to show the world how much of our seas are protected," said Dan Laffoley, Chair of IUCN's WCPA – Marine. "These new innovative approaches show everyone the urgent need for governments and all of us to radically scale up MPA networks as well as the ambition and effectiveness by which we manage marine resources."

As one of the foremost repositories of information on marine protected areas, WDPA-Marine is intended to help managers and decision makers to better understand the nature of the marine environment where human activity is regulated or restricted in order to maintain the integrity and biodiversity of the ecosystem. It is the culmination of contributions from many governments, regional partnerships, NGOs, and academicians who have participated greatly in the development and improved quality and quantity of MPA data over the past decades.

This new system allows users to view information on marine protected areas in their web browser, to visualise them in Google Earth, to download data, to bring together other important data like species and ecosystem information into the same portal and more.

The WDPA-Marine "has been designed with marine protected area practitioners, stakeholders and policy makers within conservation organisations, governments, UN agencies and multinational environmental agreements in mind," Teleki said.

UNEP-WCMC Director Jon Hutton added, "The most important element of this project is that it allows the "repatriation" of critically important biodiversity information to coastal nations which may not have their own systems. I look forward to working with many of them as they develop their capacity based around this data, which is being made freely available for the first time."

The WDPA-Marine comes as nations, communities and people around the globe mark *World Oceans Day* - a day designated by the United Nations to raise awareness of the current challenges faced by the international community in connection with the oceans and to seek solutions such as those offered through the establishment of marine protected areas.

#### **Notes to editors**

This press release is available in English, French, and Spanish.

The WDPA-Marine can be accessed online at [www.wdpa-marine.org](http://www.wdpa-marine.org)

Originally established in 1981 by the IUCN and containing more than 150,000 records, the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) provides the only comprehensive global inventory of the world's protected areas. Incorporating the official UN List of Protected Areas, this database is a key conservation resource, not only within the biodiversity community, but also for commercial organizations striving to minimize the impact of their activities on the environment.

The WDPA - Marine is supported by the public-private partnership – Proteus ( <http://proteus.unep-wcmc.org> ). Launched in 2003, this innovative partnership was created to make biodiversity information more freely available to the world and since 2006 has focused on rebuilding the WDPA and improving its quality in priority areas. The WDPA is a 'foundation' dataset for conservation activity worldwide, and central to high-level risk assessment for private sector activities that have a footprint on the natural world. The information it provides is strategic for private sector decision-making to meet their sustainability and corporate responsibility commitments.

The objectives of the WDPA-Marine are to provide:

- the most up-to-date and comprehensive information for the analysis of marine protected areas as well as marine and coastal ecosystems;
- the basis of the UN Millennium Development Goals and 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership information on marine protection;
- the best source of information on marine protection (throughout the world/at national and regional levels);
- the most up-to-date spatial marine protected areas and marine and coastal ecosystems information available free of charge to view and download for non-commercial use;
- the platform where marine protected areas spatial data is uploaded into the United Nations List of Protected Areas;
- a official repository and back-up system for government data on marine protected areas; and
- the foundation database for tools dealing with high-level risks associated with the development of the marine environment.

### **MPA and Ocean Statistics**

There are just over 5,000 marine protected areas covering more than 3.1 million sq. km (<1% earth's surface), compared to more than 115,000 terrestrial protected areas which cover 18 million sq. Km (11.9% earth's surface).

The smallest MPA is Echo Bay Provincial Park in Canada with a documented area of 0.4 ha and the largest MPA is the Phoenix Islands Protected Area in Kiribati with a documented area of 41,050,000 ha.

The average nationally designated MPA size is 55,278.465 ha.

The oldest designated MPA is the San Juan County/Cypress Island Marine Biological Preserve in the United States which was designated in 1923.

52 per cent of the 441 global fishing stocks through the world are fully exploited, 17 per cent of these fishing stocks are over exploited and 7 per cent are depleted (Review of the state of world marine fishery resources (2005). *FAO Fisheries Technical Paper* . No. 457. Rome, FAO. 235p.);

90 per cent of big fish are gone (Myers, R. & Worm, B. (2003). Rapid worldwide depletion of predatory fish communities. *Nature* 423: 280-283);

By 2025 the world's coastal populations are expected to reach 6 billion people (UNEP (2007). *Global Environmental Outlook – 4*. United Nations Environment Programme. 540p.);

By 2050 it is estimated that 91 per cent of the world's coastlines will be impacted by human development (Sale, P.F., M.J. Butler IV, A.J. Hooten, J.P. Kritzer, K.C. Lindeman, Y. J. Sadovy de Mitcheson, R.S. Steneck, and H. van Lavieren, 2008. *Stemming Decline of the Coastal Ocean: Rethinking Environmental Management*, UNU-INWEH, Hamilton, Canada);

80 per cent of ocean pollution originates from land-based activities (Nellemann, C. and Corcoran, E. (Eds). 2006. *Our precious coasts – Marine pollution, climate change and the resilience of coastal ecosystems*. United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal, Norway, [www.grida.no](http://www.grida.no));

Outside of Europe and North America, more than 80 per cent of sewage enters the ocean untreated (Sale, P.F., M.J. Butler IV, A.J. Hooten, J.P. Kritzer, K.C. Lindeman, Y. J. Sadovy de Mitcheson, R.S. Steneck, and H. van Lavieren, 2008. *Stemming Decline of the Coastal Ocean: Rethinking Environmental Management*, UNU-INWEH, Hamilton, Canada);

Certain parts of the ocean contain almost 1 million plastic particles per square kilometre (Greenpeace (2006). *Plastic Debris in the World's Oceans*. Greenpeace International, Amsterdam, Netherlands. [www.oceans.greenpeace.org](http://www.oceans.greenpeace.org) ).

**Quotations / comment available from:**

Kristian Teleki, Head of the One Ocean Programme, UNEP-WCMC

Charles Besancon, Head of Protected Areas Programme, UNEP-WCMC

Colleen Corrigan, Senior Programme Officer, Protected Areas Programme, UNEP-WCMC

Nicola Barnard, Senior Programme Officer, One Ocean Programme, UNEP-WCMC

Craig Mills, Senior GIS Applications Developer, Informatics Programme, UNEP-WCMC

Other UNEP-WCMC, IUCN and/or Proteus representatives

The United Nations Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre

[protectedareas@unep-wcmc.org](mailto:protectedareas@unep-wcmc.org) Tel: +44 1223 277 314

or

Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson/Head of Media, +41 79 596 57 37 or [nick.nuttall@unep.org](mailto:nick.nuttall@unep.org)

## **About UNEP**

The United Nations Environment Programme, established in 1972, is the voice for the environment within the United Nations system. UNEP acts as a catalyst, advocate, educator and facilitator to promote the wise use and sustainable development of the global environment. To accomplish this, UNEP works with a wide range of partners, including United Nations entities, international organisations, national governments non-governmental organisations, the private sector and civil society.

## **About UNEP-WCMC**

The **UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre** is the biodiversity assessment and biodiversity policy support arm of the United Nations Environment Programme, the world's foremost intergovernmental environmental organization. The Centre has been in operation for over 25 years, providing objective, scientifically rigorous products and services to help decision makers recognize the value of biodiversity and apply this knowledge to all that they do. The Centre's core business is locating data about biodiversity and its conservation, interpreting and analysing that data to provide assessments and policy analysis, and making the results available to both national and international decision makers and businesses.

## **About the World Commission of Protected Areas – Marine**

WCPA – Marine is the world's premier network of Marine Protected Area (MPA) expertise and is the driving force behind the recently launched MPA initiative *Protect Planet Ocean* ([www.protectplanetoocean.org](http://www.protectplanetoocean.org)). The mission of WCPA-Marine is 'to promote the establishment of a global, representative system of effectively managed and lasting networks of MPAs'. As part of the World Commission on Protected Areas it works in partnership with IUCN's Global Programme on Protected Areas and IUCN's Global Marine programme, and has members in many of the countries of the world that border an ocean or sea.