

# Draft Framework for Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas



## Background

The past several decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the use of marine protected areas (MPAs) as a conservation and management tool to protect the nation's most important natural and cultural marine resources and areas. In response to this trend, Presidential Executive Order 13158 (May 26, 2000) directs the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National MPA Center to work with the Department of the Interior and other federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal government partners and stakeholders to create and implement a framework for developing an effective national system of MPAs.

Since its inception in 2001, the MPA Center has been gathering fundamental information to draft a framework that meets diverse, ecosystem-based and cultural conservation objectives throughout U.S. waters by using the best available science and partnerships with existing MPA programs. The proposed draft framework describes the rationale, goals, and objectives of the national system and a collaborative roadmap for implementation based on sound science and broad stakeholder input.

The draft framework is both flexible and adaptable. It describes how existing MPA sites and programs across levels of government can work together, in consultation with stakeholders, to determine the most appropriate approaches for developing the national system. These collaborative efforts will help to increase the protection of important marine resources; contribute to the nation's overall social and economic health; support government agency efficiency, cooperation and integration; and improve the public's access to scientific information and decision-making concerning the nation's marine resources.

The draft framework was published for a 145-day public comment period on September 22, 2006.

## Framework Overview: Introduction

The following outlines the major components of the draft framework.

*Origin and Overview of the Draft Framework:* Outlines the process through which the draft framework was developed, including the role of the MPA Federal Advisory Committee, a summary of stakeholder and agency participation, and the input of state and federal advisory groups. Summarizes the rationale for and benefits of the national system.

*U.S. MPA Programs and Related Efforts:* Summarizes the existing federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local MPA programs and systems that are the building blocks of the national system. Also provides an overview of related MPA initiatives that can benefit from and add value to the national system.

## Defining the National System

*National System Goals, Objectives, and Criteria:* Describes the following major national system goals: 1) advancing the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources through ecosystem-based approaches to using MPAs; 2) enhancing of MPA stewardship and effectiveness; and 3) strengthening MPA coordination. Further defines specific criteria for identifying existing MPAs for possible participation in the national system, including the definition of "MPA" and associated key terms, and other criteria, such as approval of the managing agency to participate.

## Developing the National System

*Phase 1: Build and Support the Initial National System:* Outlines processes for identifying MPAs for possible participation in the National System and working with managing agencies to develop partnerships. Includes opportunities for public comment and requires consultation with managing agencies to obtain approval for their sites to participate. Further describes options for working with participating MPAs to support regional coordination on MPA management and planning issues and solutions to shared needs for enhancing MPA stewardship.

*Phase 2: Identify Gaps and Future Conservation Priorities:* Summarizes the key principles for collaborative planning at ecosystem, regional and national levels to identify gaps in the national system and future conservation priorities, based on: 1) assessments of how existing MPAs collectively meet national system goals; 2) levels of protection afforded by other marine management efforts; 3) characterization of natural and cultural resources, habitats and ecosystems; and 4) evaluation of human uses and impacts.

### **Maintaining the Official List of MPAs**

Describes the MPA list to be maintained by the MPA Center to provide key information on sites that are participating in the national system. The list of MPAs will be published regularly in the *Federal Register* and posted on <http://www.mpa.gov>.

### **Evaluating Effectiveness and Reporting Progress and Priorities**

Calls for the development of a set of indicators, performance measures and a protocol for monitoring and assessing effectiveness of the national system based on advice from the MPA Federal Advisory Committee, scientists, managers, and other experts. Describes annual and biennial reporting.

### **Input and Recommendations**

In early 2005, the MPA Center began engaging the nation in a series of dialogues to develop the framework. The input and recommendations received provide a foundation for the document that represents the nation's interests in the conservation and sustainable use of its marine resources. The following MPA Center-sponsored efforts solicited recommendations from specific MPA agency and stakeholder groups. In addition, the MPA Center provided briefings and presentations at more than 50 other meetings of MPA stakeholders around the country.

*MPA Federal Advisory Committee and Meetings:* The MPA Federal Advisory Committee, with 30 members representing broad stakeholder groups and nine federal agency *ex-officio* members, was convened in 2003 and meets semi-annually to provide recommendations on the development of the national system and implementation of the MPA Executive Order. The Committee delivered its first recommendations in June 2005.

*Federal Interagency MPA Working Group and Workshop:* A federal agency working group provides coordinated advice from federal agencies on the implementation of the MPA Executive Order. A workshop held in January 2005 with federal agency representatives from around the country and ongoing meetings and discussions of the workgroup have provided significant input.

*State Advisory Group and Workshops:* This ongoing forum provides states and territories an opportunity to provide input about their MPA activities that support the MPA Executive Order and ways the Order can support them. In addition, three regional workshops of fishery, coastal, and cultural resource agency representatives were held in 2005 and a recommendations report was delivered in April 2006.

*Tribal Meetings:* The MPA Center has contacted coastal tribes around the nation and is scheduling meetings with tribal governments and organizations to solicit their input. In addition, a panel of tribal representatives from around the country provided their perspectives to the MPA Federal Advisory Committee in 2005.

*Regional Public Dialogues:* A series of five regional forums were held in 2005 to provide information on the process to develop the framework and offer an opportunity for public input and recommendations.

### **For More Information**

Write to [mpa.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:mpa.comments@noaa.gov), visit <http://www.mpa.gov>, or contact:

Jonathan Kelsey, National System Coordinator  
[Jonathan.Kelsey@noaa.gov](mailto:Jonathan.Kelsey@noaa.gov)

Dr. Charles Wahle, Director, Science Institute  
[Charles.Wahle@noaa.gov](mailto:Charles.Wahle@noaa.gov)

Joseph A. Uravitch, AICP, Director  
[Joseph.Uravitch@noaa.gov](mailto:Joseph.Uravitch@noaa.gov)

