



OUR SEA OF ISLANDS COMMUNIQUÉ
A Regional Forum for Oceania¹ on Marine Managed Areas and World Heritage
29 January – 2 February 2007
Honolulu, Hawaii

The *Our Sea of Islands Forum* brought together more than 100 community and traditional leaders, practitioners, and managers from throughout Oceania² with expertise in the management of marine managed areas (MMAs)³. The Forum was initiated and co-chaired by UNESCO's World Heritage Centre and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) Marine National Monument, the newest marine protected area in Oceania, in order to foster collaborative partnerships, learn from one another and share experiences across Oceania. The participants expressed their deep appreciation to the State of Hawai'i and all the sponsors, and for the hospitality provided by Hawaii's community in welcoming them to Honolulu.

The Pacific Ocean spans more than one-third of the Earth's surface and is known for its vast marine resources, high biological diversity and diverse cultural heritage. The marine environment unites and sustains the people of Oceania who rely on healthy coastal and oceanic ecosystems for food, transport, traditional practices and economic opportunity. Thus, the protection and sustainable use of marine resources and their associated habitats are critically important now and to the future of Oceania's societies and the world.

The islands of Oceania are connected by common history, culture and ancestry. Indigenous Oceanic cultures and traditions, and their connectivity to natural resources, have evolved over many generations. These cultures have a proud history of distant ocean navigators and way finders that utilized the wind, sea and stars to maintain regional connections over centuries. These cultures also have a rich heritage in natural resource stewardship, management practices and knowledge. The similarities and connections between these islands make it important to renew these ties between all Oceania, north to south and east to west and across national jurisdictions to share lessons learned, challenges and opportunities.

The *Our Sea of Islands Forum* was the first opportunity in over a decade for people across Oceania to meet and discuss the diversity of types, scales, approaches and status of MMA development and management across the region. Participants valued this opportunity for dialogue as an interconnected Oceania, especially including Hawaii, and recognized the need to work together to protect our ocean home.

Oceania has demonstrated global leadership in their commitment to marine conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources. Approximately 25% of the world's marine protected areas are located in Oceania, and all the jurisdictions in Oceania have established MMAs, particularly using community-based and traditional approaches.

In addition, many jurisdictions are actively working on large-scale MMA projects, including nominations for World Heritage status. The three largest MMAs in the world are in Oceania. Australia's well-known Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, a World Heritage area, is widely respected for its effective and innovative management. In 2006, Kiribati and the United States each established new MMAs that are comparable to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in size and biological diversity -- the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) in Kiribati and the NWHI Marine National Monument in Hawaii. The Fiji government led the world with its commitment to implement a network of MMAs in 30% of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by 2020. Inspired by Fiji, the *Micronesia Challenge* was launched, bringing five Micronesian governments together in a regional commitment to conserve at least 30% of their nearshore waters and 20% of their terrestrial resources by 2020.

Even with all of Oceania's initiatives, the current rate of MMA development in Oceania is substantially lower than required to reach the global targets for 2010 and 2012⁴. Preliminary analysis indicates that these targets are unlikely to be met for at least several decades unless action is accelerated.

Increased investment in strategically adaptive MMA development and management is urgently needed to respond to global and local threats, including habitat loss, climate change, ocean acidification, invasive species, pollution, and overexploitation.

Participants at the Forum identified and recognized critical needs, gaps and opportunities that must be addressed to sustain Oceania's people and environment. Outcomes focused in six key areas of marine area management -- progress and status in MMA development, customary practices, surveillance and enforcement, science to inform management, conservation finance, and the application of the World Heritage Convention.

The participants affirmed that traditional knowledge and management practices are integral to the maintenance, development and management of MMAs in Oceania. This principle underpins all of the following commendations, proposed participant actions and recommendations to governments and organizations by the *Our Sea of Islands Forum*.

For outstanding leadership in advancing MMAs, the participants recognized:

- The fundamental role of traditional leaders and communities in effectively managing marine areas throughout Oceania.
- Significant national momentum, support and political leadership for MMAs, as evidenced by existing efforts of all governments and the recent large-scale commitments by the governments of Fiji, Kiribati, a collaborative effort of the state of Hawaii and the United States Federal government, and the five Micronesia Challenge partners -- the Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.
- Strong regional support for MMAs, as expressed recently by leaders in the 37th Pacific Island Leaders Forum Communiqué, the 17th Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) Meeting and Ministerial Forum statement, and others.
- Increased international focus on the importance of islands and MMAs provided by the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) Island Biodiversity Programme of Work, UNESCO World Heritage Convention's Pacific 2009 Action Plan and the emerging Global Island Partnership (GLISPA).

In their work to further develop MMAs, participants will endeavor to:

- Strengthen, promote and respect traditional knowledge, cultural values, local management structures and practices, and traditional rights.
- Share information on traditional knowledge, cultural values and local management structures and practices relevant to MMAs, and integrate these into the formal education system.
- Ensure that management of marine areas recognizes the biological, physical and cultural connectivity between the land and the sea.
- Engage and support decision-makers and leaders at all levels of society to take leadership in marine resource conservation.
- Ensure that scientific research is driven by local and national needs, utilizes traditional ecological knowledge, incorporates and strengthens local expertise, and is shared with local communities and resource managers.
- Work with other sectors to demonstrate the essential role of MMAs in sustainable development.
- Develop effective surveillance and enforcement capacity, including programs to strengthen and support traditional/customary and community enforcement through practitioner exchanges and regional workshops.
- Integrate social, cultural, economic and environmental priorities in local, national and regional marine resource management strategies.

Participants recommended that governments and organizations:

- Integrate customary resource management into national and regional MMA policies and strategies and ensure adequate resources, appropriate technology, and capacity are channeled to support local community management, monitoring, enforcement and compliance.
- Build local indigenous capacity for all aspects of marine area management.
- Take action on their commitments to global and national targets for MMAs, and develop national targets to expand and strengthen representative, resilient systems of MMAs with clear management objectives.
- Strengthen strategic alliances and collaboration at all levels to build support for MMAs, and effectively engage partners across sectors to demonstrate the essential role of MMAs in sustainable use of marine resources and sustainable development.
- Apply the diversity of MMA approaches in the region as key tools to support ecosystem-based management for conservation and sustainable use of nearshore and oceanic marine resources.
- Further strengthen World Heritage activities for marine conservation in Oceania and work together for World Heritage nominations, ensuring that communities and local leadership participate in the process.

- Support local traditions and cultures as part of the natural/cultural landscapes and seascapes of World Heritage sites.
- Evaluate remote and inaccessible islands and reefs for potential as large-scale MMAs.
- Collaborate in the management of remote and large ecosystem MMAs, and engage and plan with maritime agencies (e.g. navies, coast guards, commercial shipping) in MMA protection, surveillance, enforcement and monitoring.
- Apply research to address common problems of ocean acidification, climate change and invasive species on a regional and global scale.
- Develop a regional baseline paper on MMA achievements and investment, highlighting the significant contribution of Oceania to global targets and the need for additional investment to achieve those targets.
- Mobilize national, regional and international financial resources and refine funding mechanisms to be adaptive and flexible in order to support meaningful action at the community level, taking into account community timeframes, capacity, and ability to absorb external resources.
- Consider the newly adopted Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), specifically as it affects GEF investment in marine biodiversity, and provides input to the next RAF review (2008) to recognize the importance of marine biodiversity in Oceania.
- Strengthen relationships and foster peer learning exchanges across the islands of Oceania, and include all jurisdictions – countries, territories, commonwealths and states – in future discussions of MMAs and World Heritage site development, so this valuable exchange can continue.

¹ Oceania encompasses Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia and Australia.

² Participants came from 20 countries, territories and states, including the islands of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, Hawai'i (USA), Kiribati, New Zealand, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, as well as Australia and the United States of America. More than 20 organizations were represented, including Bishop Museum, Community Conservation Network, Conservation International, Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), Hawaii Institute for Marine Biology, Kaho'olawe Reserve Commission, Micronesia Conservation Trust, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), The Nature Conservancy, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, University of Hawaii, University of the South Pacific, US All Islands Coral Reef Secretariat, US Coast Guard, US Department of Agriculture, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), US National Park Service, US State Department, World Conservation Union (IUCN), Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). (Participant list available)

³ Marine Managed Areas (MMAs) were considered in their fullest sense – inclusive of the diversity of design, type, scale and approach found in coastal and oceanic areas managed for conservation and/or sustainable use of marine resources.

⁴ Global targets adopted by Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) to halt the decline of biodiversity loss by 2010 and to develop national and regional networks of marine protected areas by 2012.

