

[NOTE: This document was distributed to the MPA Federal Advisory Committee at the June 24-25, 2003 meeting. It is currently under review based on input from the Committee during the meeting and will be revised shortly.]

CRAFTING THE FRAMEWORK FOR AN EFFECTIVE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS: AN INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE

*Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee
Inaugural Meeting, Washington, DC
June 24-25, 2003*

Toward An Effective National System Of Marine Protected Areas

The Challenges and Opportunities Of MPAs

As concern over the health of the ocean grows, many nations including the United States are using marine protected areas (MPAs) to conserve important marine ecosystems and to sustain the human uses they support. The ongoing inventory of U.S. MPAs being conducted by the National MPA Center and its federal and state partners is expected to ultimately contain between 1,000-2,000 distinct marine areas that are managed by federal, state, local and tribal authorities for conservation purposes. In addition, numerous efforts are currently underway to design, establish or revise MPAs throughout the state and federal waters of the U.S.

MPAs can be effective tools to balance sustainable use with long-term conservation of the ocean, especially when they are based on sound science and input from stakeholders. MPAs are not, however, without controversy and challenges. Chief among these is the increasingly acute need for a more cohesive and transparent national approach to the planning and management of all types of MPAs. At present, we do not have adequate information on the location, purpose or potential impacts (neither individually nor cumulatively) for many of the MPAs in US waters. Moreover, the nation lacks a common vision and set of guiding principles for how we may wish to use this tool to achieve diverse marine conservation and management goals at local, regional and national scales.

The National Response

Executive Order 13158 was a direct response to widespread demands for a better approach to using MPAs to conserve and manage marine habitats. To that end, federal agencies are now directed to work with diverse partners in the public and private sectors to ensure *an effective national system of federal, state, local and tribal MPAs designated and managed by existing authorities that collectively fulfill broad conservation and management goals at local, regional and national levels*. Building from the foundation of existing MPAs of all types, the nation's system will evolve gradually as individual sites are added, modified or eliminated by management agencies. Properly planned, the national system will ultimately fulfill a variety of conservation and management goals including sustaining and protecting biodiversity, fisheries, and cultural resources, and associated recreational, commercial, scientific and educational uses.

To be truly effective, and to provide added value beyond the existing portfolio of MPAs, a national system must:

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- Use straightforward and consistent terminology that allows all parties to understand, describe, and evaluate the purposes and likely impacts of various MPA types
- Be built upon a foundation of rigorous and transparent science
- Engage stakeholders in all aspects of planning and management
- Recognize the human dimension of place-based marine conservation
- Match specific MPA actions to clearly articulated needs and measurable objectives
- Build agency capacity to effectively plan, manage, enforce and evaluate MPAs
- Be managed adaptively through monitoring and evaluation
- Foster greater coordination among MPA agencies in assessing and meeting conservation and management needs at regional and ecosystem scales.

Getting There From Here: Crafting A *Framework* For A National System Of MPAs

To envision an effective national system of MPAs will first require a *practical guiding framework* that clearly articulates what we seek to achieve, how we expect to proceed, and how we will know when we have achieved our goals. Consequently, the guiding framework will consist of three broad components:

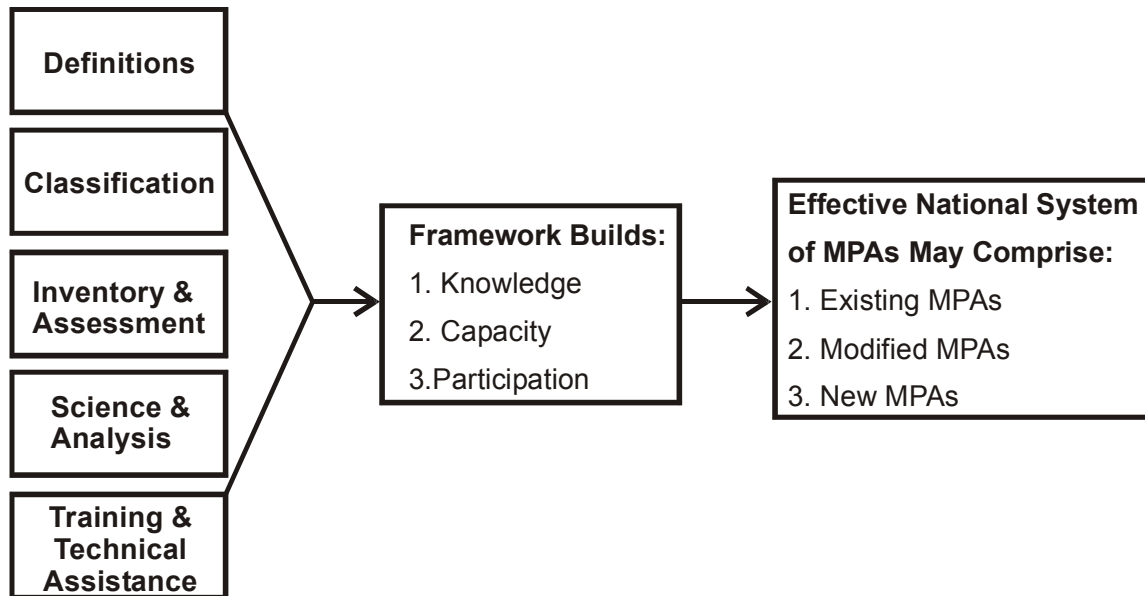
Knowledge – understanding the current and future contributions of MPAs in meeting diverse conservation and management needs and objectives at local, regional and national scales.

Capacity -- strengthening the ability of MPA programs and stakeholders to effectively design, plan, manage and evaluate MPAs of all types.

Participation – fostering innovative and constructive ways to engage diverse stakeholder interests in the national dialogue on MPAs.

Combined, these three components will ensure that the nation’s science-based system of MPAs provides added value and achieves multiple conservation and management goals in an effective, efficient and equitable way. The figure below illustrates how some of the current activities of the National MPA Center and its partners are contributing to the development of the framework for an effective national system of MPAs in the United States.

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An Invitation To Collaborate

The National Marine Protected Areas Center has been working with many partners to inventory and assess the nation's current portfolio of MPAs. Now, the Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior are pleased to invite the members of the Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee to collaborate on crafting a science-based framework that will help guide the nation toward a more effective system of MPAs. Over the coming months, we hope to engage the full Committee, and its working groups, in a vital dialogue on how best to design and initiate the framework process. Near-term efforts that would benefit from the diverse perspectives of the Committee's membership include feedback on:

- Proposed MPA Classification System and Types (in binder)
- Draft criteria for inclusion of marine managed areas into the inventory (Federal Register)
- Draft Strategy for Social Science Research on MPAs (available at the meeting and on mpa.gov)
- Refining the scope, goals, performance criteria and public participation mechanisms for developing the framework for the national system of MPAs

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