

**MARINE CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS –  
A PRACTITIONER’S TOOLKIT:  
WWW.MCATOOLKIT.ORG**

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**KEYWORDS:** marine conservation, submerged lands, agreements, leasing, ownership, toolkit, proprietary rights

Over the past several years, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have realized that formal protected areas may not be sufficient to protect ocean and coastal biodiversity, particularly in areas where rights have already been granted to specific owners and users. To address this, NGOs are increasingly using Marine Conservation Agreements (MCAs), an approach that includes any formal or informal understanding between two or more parties in which the parties obligate themselves, for an exchange of benefits, to take certain actions, refrain from certain actions, or transfer certain rights and responsibilities to achieve agreed upon ocean or coastal conservation goals. MCAs can be entered into by governments, communities, private entities, and private individuals.

Private, for-profit entities routinely enter into agreements and acquire rights to marine areas and resources for a wide range of purposes such as marinas, utility lines, gravel mining, aquaculture, and oil extraction. Also, in many parts of the world, marine tenure systems are such that communities and fishing cooperatives have rights to marine areas. NGOs are now using these private models in collaboration with local communities and governments for purposes that improve and protect the marine environment.

Common examples of MCAs include leases, licenses, easements, management agreements, purchase and sale agreements, concessions, and contracts. NGOs have used MCAs to help manage specific areas, harvesting methods, and access to resources. These efforts have protected important marine biodiversity while positioning NGOs as vested and solution-oriented stakeholders with governments and communities responsible for decision-making.

There are numerous existing MCA projects throughout the globe. One of the best known MCA project is the Chumbe Island Coral Park in Tanzania. Other examples include The Nature Conservancy’s 13,000-acre Great South Bay project on Long Island, New York, and the 180,000 sq km Phoenix Island Protected Area which was established in part based on a “reverse fishing license” -- an agreement being developed by the Government of Kiribati, Conservation International, and the New England Aquarium.

The existing projects have provided insight for the successful application of MCAs, including:

1. Fish Protection – While MCAs can be used to protect numerous features of the ocean and coastal environment, most projects directly or indirectly protect finfish, shellfish or their habitats.
2. Diversity - MCAs are currently being used by diverse organizations, under diverse circumstances, and in diverse geographies.
3. Local Integration - Many existing projects that show significant signs of success involve the direct participation of local communities and provide opportunities for local employment.
4. Varying Scales - MCAs can be applied at small scales and extremely large scales.
5. Project Champions – Many MCA projects came to fruition due to the perseverance, persuasive abilities, and personal relationships of forward-thinking, bold, and charismatic project leaders. Successful project leaders have accounted for the cultural, social, political, and economic issues of the local communities.

This presentation will explore the newly released Marine Conservation Agreements Toolkit ([www.mcatoolkit.org](http://www.mcatoolkit.org)) by discussing the four phases of MCA projects (1) Feasibility analysis; 2) Stakeholder engagement; 3) Building the agreement; and 4) Implementation) while providing case study examples.

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