



## **Minimum data and information requirements for MPAs**

*We need to share accurate information on Marine Protected Areas (MPA) if we are to track progress, celebrate achievements and lever more action. This paper provides a brief synopsis on the MINIMUM data requirements necessary for immediate and effective global monitoring of MPAs.*

*A manual providing more detailed definitions and explanations of the minimum data requirements and how these relate to optimum requirements is currently being developed to complement this synopsis in collaboration with UNEP WCMC.*

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## Background and Rationale

An urgent global priority for the MPA community is to ensure that we all have up-to-date and accurate information on MPAs so that our knowledge and subsequent decisions are based on the best data available. This is critical as it underpins the future strategy for protecting the oceans and leveraging greater political and public support to do so.

WCPA – Marine’s role around the world is to assure the quality of MPA data and information to ensure that the very latest and accurate information on MPAs is held in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA). This is a joint venture of UNEP and IUCN, produced by UNEP-WCMC and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN-WCPA) in collaboration with governments and NGOs.

To support this process, it is necessary to be clear about *what* metrics for MPAs need quality assurance and what the standards are. This document therefore sets out the global *minimum* standards for MPA data: parameters that need to be reviewed and quality assured for every MPA. Existing data will need to be reviewed and gaps filled against the standards set out in this paper. It is expected that all MPAs must at least meet these minimum requirements to be registered in the WDPA and included in national, regional or global analyses.

Alongside these standards, and on behalf of our many partners and IUCN, WCPA – Marine is also developing and implementing a global process and suite of products that support the implementation of a representative global network of MPAs. The ultimate goal of this collaborative work is to ensure that quality assured, up-to-date and accurate information on all MPAs is freely and widely available to all.

## Minimum core data and information parameters for MPAs

The following is the list of minimum core data and information parameters that are required for every MPA as part of the quality assurance process for the WDPA through WCPA-Marine. Many important aspects of MPAs (e.g. more detailed regulatory information, management effectiveness, governance, compliance, budgetary information) are excluded from this list simply by virtue of the scale of the task to collect these minimum data for every MPA. **As such this list should be viewed as a temporary / intermediate goal for database content which will be built upon** once the minimum requirements have been met globally for all MPAs.

Minimum data to be provided for **qualifying sites** (see explanatory note 1):

Level*	Field	Format	Definition	Links
1	Official?	Yes/No	Is the site on the UN list of MPAs for that country?	WDPA
1	Location	Drop-down list	country, territory or high seas	WDPA
1	Name - original	Text	MPA Name in original language & alphabet	WDPA
1	Name - English	Text	MPA Name as english translation	WDPA
1	Designation type - original	Text	Designation type in original language & alphabet	WDPA
1	Designation type - English	Text	Designation type as english translation	WDPA
1	Designation status	Text	Officially agreed status of the designation	WDPA
1	Date designated	Date	Date site designated under relevant legal / non-statutory agreement	WDPA
1	GIS of boundary available?	Yes/No		WDPA
1	Latitude	Decimal	Latitude of central point inside MPA boundary	WDPA
1	Longitude	Decimal	Longitude of central point inside MPA boundary	WDPA
1	Total area	Decimal	Total area contained within boundary including land, freshwater, marine etc	WDPA
1	Marine area	Decimal	Area below mean high water mark contained within boundary	WDPA
1	Intertidal	Yes/No	Boundary includes intertidal habitat - i.e. area between mean high and mean low water marks	WDPA
1	Subtidal	Yes/No	Boundary includes subtidal habitat - i.e. area below mean low water mark	WDPA
1	No-take <sup>2</sup>	Drop-down list	MPA has all / part / no no-take area (where extraction of resources is prohibited)	

2	No-take area	Decimal	Actual no-take area within MPA	WDP Management Effectiveness
2	Designating agreement name	Text	Name of legislation / non-statutory agreement used to designate the site	WDP; EcoLex
2	Designating agreement year	Number	Year of legislation / non-statutory agreement used to designate the site	WDP; EcoLex
2	GIS of boundary provided?	Yes/No		WDP
2	Metadata for GIS data	Text	Metadata for spatial data	WDP
2	Management objective(s)	Text	Important reason for protecting area	WDP (redeveloped)
2	Management organisation	Text	Name of organisation responsible for management of site	WDP
2	Date management began	Date	Date ACTIVE management began of the site	WDP Management Effectiveness
2	Date management ended	Date	Date ACTIVE management of the site ended (if applicable)	WDP Management Effectiveness
2	IUCN category	Number	IUCN protected area management category.	WDP

\* Level 1 = required for a site to be included in the database; Level 2 = necessary for preliminary analysis

<sup>2</sup>See explanatory note 2

## Explanatory Notes

### Explanatory note 1: Criteria for sites to ‘qualify’ as an MPA

The IUCN definition of a protected area will be the primary one used, but with explicit recognition of its relationship to the CBD definition<sup>1</sup> and other global marine targets (namely the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the World Parks Congress targets).

A practical interpretation of this definition must be developed that can be used to determine what spatial management tools should be considered in identifying MPAs, and therefore included in the database. This is provided below.

The 2008 IUCN definition of Protected Area (including Marine Protected Areas):

*“A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values”.*

The following provides a brief overview of how aspects of this definition will be operationally defined. This is intended to complement the more explanation provided on page 17-19 of the IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories.

‘A *clearly defined geographical space*’ will be operationally defined as being:

- a spatially delineated area;
- in order to qualify as ‘marine’, the official boundary must extend seaward of the mean high water mark. Note:
  - PAs that are predominantly terrestrial but whose boundaries extend to the mean low water mark will be included;
  - PAs which are ‘adjacent to’ the ocean (as per the CBD definition), but include **NO** marine area (i.e. are landward of the mean high water mark), will not be included;
  - In PAs where the only marine area is lagoonal, the lagoon must have a permanent, surface connection to the sea;
- An alternative view might have been to only consider PAs whose marine area is above a specified minimum percentage of the total area. However this is not currently practical to implement because:
  - The range in total area for existing MPAs spans several orders of magnitude, so a percentage-based rule would be inappropriate;

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<sup>1</sup> The CBD definition of Marine and Coastal Protected Area is (important aspects for monitoring purposes are highlighted in bold): ‘any defined area within or **adjacent to** the marine environment, together with its overlying waters and associated flora, fauna, and historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by legislation or other effective means, including custom, with the effect that its marine and/or coastal biodiversity enjoys a higher level of protection than its surroundings’ The CBD definition is also expanded in the context of the CBD targets to include ‘area-based measures, for example, marine protected areas and **other means of protection**’.

- An absolute marine area-based rule is currently not feasible because of the difficulties in confirming total and marine area for many sites;

**Note:** the collection of information on presence/absence of intertidal and subtidal components within MPA boundaries will allow for a broad classification of MPAs

*‘recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means,’* will be operationally defined as:

- An area ‘designated’ as protected through any one or combination of a suite of methods, including law, non-statutory agreements, and traditional, customary or voluntary arrangements. See explanatory note 2 for information on how these sites will be organized in the database;

**Note:** community conserved areas can and should be included.

*‘to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values’* will be operationally defined as:

- An MPA is considered to be *‘long-term’* if the designation has been / is intended to be in place for, ideally, a **minimum** of 5 years;
- *‘conservation’* is difficult to interpret, because the question of what constitutes ‘conservation’ is largely philosophical and therefore an open-ended debate. The definition implemented in global monitoring must seek to encompass as much of the range of levels of protection (i.e. regulation of human activities) that apply in MPAs across the world as possible. It will thus be operationally defined here as follows:
  - The area should have an objective of:
    - Conservation and/or sustainable use of the environment; and/or
    - Enjoyment of the marine environment;

**Note:** The effect of designating the MPA, and thereby imposing regulations on human activities, is more important than the processes which led to the area being designated. This means that sites should be considered for inclusion in the database irrespective of which governance structure (which may be affiliated with certain types of resource use) they originated from, e.g. fisheries versus conservation versus tourism & recreation.

- *‘nature, ecosystem services and cultural values’*: are all defined as in the IUCN PA management category guidelines, with the following additional consideration:
  - Areas that are created for the primary purpose of protecting a single species, perhaps during a critical life-phase such as a spawning aggregation, can still be considered MPAs if:
    - they meet all other definitional requirements listed above.
    - the species-specific regulations are seasonal, but they are implemented on a repeating and long-term basis
    - there are additional regulations in place such that activities in the MPA are more strictly regulated than the surrounding area.

## **Explanatory note 2: MPA no-take categories**

The definition of what should qualify as an MPA (in explanatory note 1) is intentionally broad in order to capture as much of the range of regulations and levels of protection afforded to MPAs globally as possible. In order to make this regulatory variation explicit, MPAs need to be categorised. **Ultimately WCPA - Marine intends to categorise MPAs according to the IUCN management categories and where countries are already using this detailed system they should continue to do so.** However, the IUCN management category system has been poorly applied to MPAs to date (partly due to a lack of clarity over how to apply them in practice and perceived complexity of the system). As such, **available data on IUCN categories for MPAs are not reliable, and need to go through a QA process for all MPAs.**

Understanding how MPAs throughout the world relate to the IUCN categories system is a long-term venture for which many countries will need support and/or discussion to achieve. In the meantime we need a quick ecologically meaningful metric to provide a broad world-wide understanding of the nature of the MPAs that have been established. As a consequence, the minimum global standard for WCPA – Marine is based on a much simplified categorization, driven by the presence of no-take area within the MPA - a common metric that has already been used for many years by the MPA community. The no-take categories are as follows:

1. The entire MPA is no-take, year-round
2. Part of the MPA area is no-take and/or the entire MPA is no-take part of the year
3. None of the MPA is no-take

No-take is defined as a complete prohibition on all extractive activities. There may be some exceptions to this, such as extremely limited/heavily regulated extraction for scientific monitoring and/or subsistence.

If the actual no-take area is known then it should be provided.