

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTED AREAS (ICMMPA 2) FORT-DE-FRANCE, MARTINIQUE, 7-11 NOV. 2011

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ICMMPA 2: ENDANGERED SPACES, ENDANGERED SPECIES EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Some 150 marine mammal protected area (MMPA) researchers and managers as well as government and conservation group representatives from 42 countries and overseas territories convened in Martinique in the French Caribbean from 7-11 November 2011 for the Second International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (ICMMPA 2). The goal: to seek solutions to shared problems related to marine mammal conservation and to MMPA site and network design, creation and management. A secondary goal was to orient those working in MMPAs to set those protected areas in the broader context of marine management, in order to ensure that MMPAs are not marginalized as marine spatial planning work advances. Unlike most scientific meetings, the ICMMPA stresses workshops, panels, and open forum discussions to emphasize collaboration, communication and networking among MMPA practitioners.

The conference was co-hosted by the French MPA Agency (Agence des aires marines protégées) and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Fifteen other international and regional sponsors, as well as a dozen supporting organizations, were actively involved, most either based in Martinique or with representation in the Caribbean.

The conference theme of “Endangered Spaces, Endangered Species” was explored in keynote talks, panels and workshops focusing on monk seals, sirenians, river dolphins and other small and large cetaceans. In several workshops and plenary talks, special attention was given to the vaquita, the most endangered, space-restricted marine mammal in the world. Delegates agreed that it will require a broad public campaign in order to generate the political will to stop the gillnet fishing that is squeezing the last life from the “shy porpoise with the little black smile”.

Plenary sessions were divided into panels, followed by discussions, focusing on:

- special considerations for particularly endangered marine mammals and whether MPAs are the right tool;
- refining our understanding of marine mammal critical habitat and hotspots to inform MMPA designation;
- using marine spatial planning and ecosystem-based management to address broad threats to marine mammals;
- managing MMPAs for localized threats and mitigation by spatial protection and other means;
- development of MMPAs in the wider Caribbean region; and



- regional cooperation for MMPA scientific and technical networking.

The workshops focused on marine mammals and oil spills, decision-making with limited data, best practices for whale watching in MMPAs, integrating marine mammal data in marine spatial planning, forging agreements to establish effective MMPA networks, and the widespread mortality attributed to fisheries bycatch.

ICMMPA 2 was hosted in the Caribbean to afford synergies and networking opportunities for the Wider Caribbean, including sessions on the eastern tropical Pacific, northeast South America, as well as on the nine river dolphin countries of South America. These sessions built upon or instituted new regional alliances, some of which were formed at the first ICMMPA in Hawaii.

Key recommendations and conclusions that emerged from the conference workshops were as follows (from global and regional levels to the taxa-specific level). Please note that the full set of recommendations is available in the proceedings.

Of global relevance, the members of the “scientific information and marine spatial planning” workshop agreed, among other things:

- to provide information and advice on how to use marine mammal science to inform decision-making and to ensure that relevant information about marine mammal important areas gets incorporated into the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) process of ecologically and biologically significant areas (EBSA) identification;
- to form a task force for developing guidelines for best practical ways to engage with the shipping industry, IMO and other sectors;
- to develop a best practices guide and standards for marine mammal spatial planning;
- to develop an action plan to identify and address critical data gaps including use of Delphic expert-knowledge approaches to complement data collection.

Additional global recommendations from various workshops were directed to the ICMMPA and associated MMPA researchers, managers and NGOs:

- to coordinate the development of a document providing guidance for the MMPA community in the form of essential underlying principles for effective development of bilateral and multilateral partnership and networking agreements and outlining appropriate legal mechanisms, best practices for development and implementation of agreements and illustrative case studies;
- to bring together stakeholders to focus on bycatch as an important part of MMPA management plans and legislation. This could include initiatives for the development and testing of marine mammal safe fishing gear, as well as serving as a focal point for knowledge about marine mammal populations, fishing type and effort within MPA boundaries, as well as for capacity-building initiatives related to disentanglement and prevention;
- to encourage international organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Ltd (ITOPF),



- among others, to work with the marine mammal community for oil spill response contingency planning, drills and preparedness, as well as to work with appropriate national authorities or international/regional bodies (such as the Regional Activity Centers) to ensure that MMPAs and marine mammals are included in such plans;
- to work with stakeholders and local communities to explore, establish or refine appropriate management frameworks, including voluntary and/or regulatory measures for marine mammal watching activities, including training, regulatory and compliance aspects.

Regionally, it was recommended that countries, managers and scientific teams of the Wider Caribbean and Eastern Pacific collaborate:

- to develop a plan to synthesize existing data, including expert opinion in maps that can be used as communication tools, and to be able to make comparisons between qualitative and quantitative summaries to include socioeconomic information;
- to use existing data inventories to identify and prioritize filling data gaps and to consider the use of large scale and standardized as well as opportunistic and cost-effective surveys to gather additional data.

The country and community representatives, MMPA managers and researchers of the North East South America MAMA COCO SEA Project (Regional cooperation for marine mammal conservation) agreed to complete a workshop background paper outlining the aims, strategies envisioned and possible synergies leading to the organization of a workshop for 2012 in Suriname to establish the current state of knowledge on marine mammals and their habitats, threats and management framework by country and to set up a regional action plan with capacity building for marine mammal conservation.

The monk seal workshop agreed that a group of monk seal scientists, managers and advocates be formed to find common values and solutions to monk seal problems, as well as to raise awareness, understanding and motivation by the public to help encourage governments to honor their commitments to saving monk seals; and that local communities, especially fishermen be engaged in monk seal conservation.

Riverine and estuarine mammal researchers, managers and NGOs recommended that upstream-downstream connectivity and ecologically viable flow be taken into account in the design and management of protected areas, and that the goals of the South American River Dolphin Protected Area Network (SARDPAN) be strengthened and fulfilled to, among other things, research and convey science-based information to protected area stakeholders.

Sirenian researchers, managers and NGOs agreed to use a regional approach for creating, managing and evaluating the effectiveness of MPAs and MPA networks for sirenians including promotion of the goals of regional management plans. They also recommended the consideration of reintroduction programs to improve sirenian conservation but with careful, transparent consideration of science, local cultural values, potential threats, legal constraints and full stakeholder involvement.



Two themes common to all levels — global, regional and species specific — emerged from the conference discussions and recommendations:

- that marine mammal researchers, managers and NGOs need to work out better ways to engage stakeholders and local communities as well as the wider public to help with local conservation efforts as well as to encourage governments toward effective conservation measures; and
- sustained funding must be found to help the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

During background discussions at the conference and over the past year, both of these themes have been considered as a possible part of an enhanced mission for the ICMMPA steering committee — i.e., the International Committee on Marine Mammal Protected Areas.

The location of the conference in the Caribbean celebrated the French declaration of the Agoa Sanctuary, itself one of the conference sponsors. Agoa has legal status already but there are more detailed plans for the 143,618km² area, which covers the French EEZ in the Caribbean, to make it into an MPA with expanded highly protected zones and a management plan. During the conference, a presentation from the Netherlands Antilles regarding Dutch waters of the Caribbean formally opened the possibility that these waters could be added to the Agoa Sanctuary or joined as part of a network that could measurably help marine mammal conservation in the Greater Caribbean. On the conference's final day, a marine mammal protected area partnership, the "Martinique Declaration", was forged between the Agoa Sanctuary, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, the Dutch Caribbean project, the Marine Mammal Sanctuary of the Dominican Republic and the Regional Activity Center for the SPAW Protocol (SPAW-RAC).

The ICMMPA conferences will continue with a proposed conference for Australia in late 2013 or 2014. Behind the scenes the International Committee for Marine Mammal Protected Areas plans to help address the needs expressed in the recommendations and to promote better networking and problem solving through the growing constituency developed from the first two conferences and in the plans for the next conference.

