

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 *(abbreviated version)*

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 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.

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.

