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## Latest News and Resources for Ocean Planners

### UN begins discussions on protecting high seas biodiversity; guide and issue brief available

The committee charged with developing the basis of a formal treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) is meeting for the first time in late March-early April 2016. Some of the issues to be addressed by the committee include the scope of the treaty, how MPAs should be created and managed, and access to and sharing of marine genetic resources. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), negotiated more than 30 years ago, did not address marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Formal negotiations for this treaty will begin in 2018. The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDR), a non-profit policy research institute based in Paris, has produced a detailed guide to the discussions providing background on UNCLOS and current governance of ABNJ, gaps in the current framework, State positions to date, and challenges that may arise in negotiating an agreement. [Download the guide](#). [Download a short issue brief](#).

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### Global map of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas published

From 2011 to 2014, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) engaged countries and experts from around the world in regional workshops to describe ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs). The workshops examined 204 areas (ranging from 5.5 km<sup>2</sup> to 11.1 million km<sup>2</sup> in area) in detail. Thirty-one (31) of the areas examined were solely outside national jurisdiction, 35 extended into national jurisdictions, 137 were solely within a national jurisdiction, and 28 were inside the jurisdictions of more than one country. (One area lacked precise boundaries.) The results of the workshop were formally recognized by the Conference of Parties to the CBD resulting in these 204 areas being identified as EBSAs. These areas represent the only global, internationally recognized suite of marine sites considered to be relatively more important from a biodiversity standpoint than their surroundings, and they will support UN deliberations on conserving biodiversity in ABNJ. [Read more about the workshops and view the map of EBSAs](#).

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### Case studies of MSP in Washington State, Rhode Island, San Francisco released

The Coastal Resources Center of the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island Sea Grant have released case studies of MSP in Washington State, Rhode Island, and San Francisco as part of their Case Studies of Marine Spatial Planning Report Series. They are available for download here: [Washington State](#), [Rhode Island](#), and [San Francisco](#).

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### Manual of marine and coastal biodiversity datasets updated

Biodiversity data for marine and coastal environments are fragmented and can be difficult to access. To start to address this problem, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre provided a manual of global marine and coastal datasets of biodiversity importance in 2014. A new edition of the manual has just been released adding 53 new resources (for a total of 128). New data sets include those related to mangrove forest cover, spawning aggregations, vulnerable marine ecosystems, global diversity hotspots for sharks, coastal recreation values, cumulative human impacts, plastic debris, and undersea cables. In addition to the information provided on existing datasets, challenges, gaps and limitations of coastal and marine data are discussed. [Download the manual](#).

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### Authors respond to comments on catch reconstruction findings

Authors Daniel Pauly and Dirk Zeller of the Sea Around Us project based at the University of British Columbia have issued a rejoinder to comments on their recent article "Catch reconstructions reveal that global marine fisheries catches are higher than reported and declining" published in *Nature Communications* in January. That paper estimated that marine fisheries catches are significantly higher than reported to the FAO and that annual landings have declined faster than official data would suggest. (See the note in last month's MEAM "[Global fishery catches and fish stock declines dramatically underreported?](#)" for the original article and responses.) The rejoinder addresses why the authors find many of the criticisms of the original article incorrect or misleading. [Read the rejoinder](#).

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### Portal to view and download observations of North Atlantic vulnerable marine ecosystems launched

A portal with data on the actual and potential distribution of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) in the North Atlantic has been launched by the Joint ICES/NAFO Working Group on Deep-water Ecology (WGDEC). VMEs are deep-sea ecosystems that can be impacted adversely by bottom contact fishing gear and include cold-water coral reefs, coral gardens and deep-sea sponge aggregations. VMEs are difficult to identify in deep-water without underwater cameras, but VME indicators, benthic species such as sponges, gorgonians, or stony corals found in trawl bycatch, may indicate VME habitat on the seabed. The database consists of both VME habitats for which there is unequivocal evidence such as ROV observations and VME indicators weighted by uncertainty to aid interpretation. [Use the database](#).

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