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Tundi's Take: Payments for ecosystem services should be done in tandem with ocean zoning

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Payment for ecosystem services (PES) is one of my favorite EBM approaches, in part because it offers the potential to generate significant new funding streams for conservation and management. Furthermore, if PES is paired with ocean zoning - as I propose it should be - the two approaches can generate some very mutually beneficial outcomes. In my view this is a marriage of convenience, and perhaps even necessity.

Let's start with PES. We can all agree that greater financial support is needed to practice marine management effectively. This is especially the case when management is trying to address a complex suite of issues all at once, as is often the case in an EBM framework. Unfortunately, as the need for greater financing is expanding, the budgets of management agencies are shrinking for various reasons. To fill this gap, and to do it in a sustainable way, new revenue streams must be in the form of steady, continuing support for the adaptive management that EBM requires - not the one-off, feel-good infusions of cash so popular with the bulk of the donor community.

It makes sense for the stakeholders who benefit from coastal and marine ecosystems, and the services those ecosystems provide, to invest in their protection. Through innovative financing schemes like PES, the planning and management costs can be shared by the public sector and the private sector (both communities and businesses).

But how to create a PES scheme? The first step is to identify areas of particular value (monetary or otherwise) due to delivery of significant ecosystem services. Marine spatial planning does just that: it leads to blueprints showing which areas are most valuable, most vulnerable, and most in need of management. Also critical is understanding the human uses of and claims to these special places. So, alongside the mapping of ecosystem services and their values, marine spatial planning can show (and clarify) property and use rights to those areas. All of this information can then be used to create a zoning plan.

This is why ocean zoning is a great partner to PES: ecosystem services information produces more robust, more easily understandable zoning plans. And the partnership gets even better: zoning plans can, conversely, pave the way for PES. Think trading zones: highly valuable areas providing ecosystem services could be where ecosystem services are "sold". Areas benefiting directly from those services would be where one looks to find the buyers. Instead of creating new MPAs right and left, maybe we need investment areas, where the coming together of zoning and PES approaches catalyzes the creation of the new revenue streams so badly needed.

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