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EBM Toolbox: Learning from others: The new global conservation planning database

Creating a new marine management or conservation plan? You can learn what others have done in the past – build on their research and experiences and avoid making the same mistakes – using the new [Conservation Planning Database](#). The database has just been launched with 163 peer-reviewed papers on 155 marine systematic conservation planning exercises worldwide. The database can help planners find relevant conservation plans from all over the world including their local area, help scientists study trends in conservation planning, and help donors and NGOs identify regions where little conservation planning has been done.

Learning from the database

According to lead database author Jorge Álvarez-Romero, a research fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University, pulling the initial database together was difficult, even with its focus on just peer-reviewed literature. This difficulty was due in large part to the recent surge in systematic conservation planning (and its attendant literature) worldwide. The rapid expansion of the literature means, however, that the time is ripe for a conservation planning database because there is tremendous potential for analyzing and synthesizing systematic conservation planning work and learning from it.

And, indeed, a [new publication in Biological Conservation](#) took an initial look at the systematic conservation plans in the database and found a number of trends including:

- Increasing consideration of socioeconomic variables, land-sea planning, ecological connectivity, and climate change in conservation planning studies;
- Limited involvement of stakeholders in many planning exercises;
- A concentration of studies in the Northern European Seas, Mediterranean Sea, Coral Triangle Tropical Southwestern Pacific, Temperate Northern Pacific and off the coasts of South Africa, Australia, Chile, and the US; and
- Regions with high levels of anthropogenic impact but very few conservation planning studies, e.g. the South European Atlantic Shelf, Saharan Upwelling, Azores Canaries Madeira ecoregion, West and South Indian shelf, South China Sea, and Caribbean.

A [free pre-print of the paper](#) is available on MarXiv.

What's next for the database?

James Cook University and partners, including the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), Imperial College, and the University of Maine, are now working to expand and improve the database. A top priority is adding a GIS/spatial module to allow storage of planning boundaries and maps of conservation priorities. "This information is practically absent from the peer reviewed literature and very patchy in the grey literature," says Álvarez-Romero. "Having this information will allow very powerful visualization and spatial analyses that are not possible yet," he adds.

Other critical next steps for the database include:

- Confirming that all of the marine systematic conservation planning work from the primary literature is in the database;
- Adding the grey literature to the database;
- Adding terrestrial and freshwater plans;
- Adding information about implementation and monitoring of conservation interventions associated with plans;
- Linking to other global databases, such as the World Database of Protected Areas, to track the development, implementation and impact of conservation planning; and
- Planning for the long-term hosting and maintenance of the database.

Add your own conservation planning exercises to the database

Planning exercises that: 1) define explicit conservation objectives, 2) identify spatially-explicit conservation areas, 3) use spatial optimization/prioritization, and 4) identify marine conservation areas are appropriate for addition to the database.

Use this [online survey](#) to walk you through the process of adding studies.

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