INTERNATIONAL WATERS EXPERIENCE NOTES

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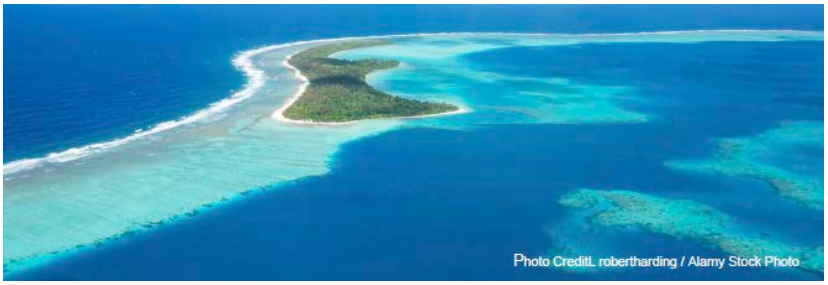
Achieving 30x30 through collaboration and partnership across a global network of MPA managers



Advancing the capacity of managers across 16 countries who are responsible for 32 large marine protected areas, the Alliance partnered with Big Ocean to increase collaboration between practitioners and ocean funders, contribute to enhanced knowledge management, development and sharing of new tools and lessons. The budding field of large-scale ocean management requires intentional collaboration between researchers, managers, and practitioners to build and design a knowledge base for how to protect large swaths of offshore ocean spaces. Big Ocean solves for this by strengthening connections between and amongst managers and practitioners to address the priority needs of practitioners working on-the-ground globally.

Key Takeaway of Big Ocean 2021 Summit and Survey:

1. Supporting a diverse and informed community of practice is essential; building management capacity alone is insufficient.
2. Decision-making processes must include Indigenous peoples/communities, customary authorities, and rights holders.
3. Understanding the impacts of a site's enabling environment must be prioritized to enhance durability.
4. Increased budgets and more effective sustainable financing mechanisms are needed

Of the 17,000 plus MPAs of all sizes globally, 70% of current ocean protection comes from approximately forty-one sites. Therefore, based on this element alone, we must consider effectively and appropriately using the Large-Scale MPA model, as well as better supporting and resourcing these managing agencies globally. Although only a handful of large-scale MPAs have existed long enough to provide comprehensive advice across all sectors of management, the partnership between Alliance and Big Ocean offers greater opportunities for replication through learning and synergy between and among the full range of communities interested in ocean management at scale.

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Achieving 30x30 through collaboration and partnership across a global network of MPA managers

Experience of the GEF - sponsored

Blue Nature Alliance to Expand and Improve the Conservation of 1.25 billion Hectares of Ocean Ecosystems

GEFID#: 10375, GEF Agency: Conservation International, Project Status: Active

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Blue Nature Alliance (Alliance) GEF Project will catalyze the conservation of 1.25 billion hectares of ocean ecosystems, to safeguard biodiversity, help build resilience to climate change, promote human well-being, and enhance ecosystem connectivity and function.

To meet this target, the Alliance*'s Component 4: Global Enabling Conditions to Scale Up Ocean Conservation* will cultivate global enabling conditions that are necessary to reach the ambitious goal of protecting 30 percent of the world's ocean. This will include new science, tools, capacity, innovations, and policy directly related to the field of large-scale ocean conservation, thus contributing to individual sites and regions more broadly.

This IWEN spotlights an activity within the *Knowledge management and learning for the fields of large-scale and transboundary ocean conservation has been strengthened and expanded (Outcome* 4.2) that will result in increased knowledge, capacity, and tools to implement ocean conservation at scale and/or transboundary ocean governance. To maximize the utility of any convenings, learning initiatives, and/or new tools and publications, Blue Nature Alliance entered into partnership with Big Ocean to increase collaboration between practitioners and ocean funders, contribute to enhanced knowledge management, development and sharing of new tools and lessons that advance the capacity of managers across 16 countries who are responsible for 32 large marine protected areas.

Big Ocean is the only peer-learning network created 'by managers for managers' of large-scale marine areas. A staunch advocate and leader in the field of Large-Scale Marine Protected Areas (LSMPA's), since its inception in 2010, Big Ocean has fostered a vibrant Community of Practice that supports best-practice management in 17 countries. Big Ocean aims to:

1. Provide a forum for communication and networking through which managers of large-scale MPAs can improve their management efforts.
2. Understand the unique social, cultural and ecological values of large-scale MPAs.
3. Contribute to the protection of our world's oceans by working together and sharing resources, as well as supporting effective management and sound scientific research.
4. Communicate the conclusions and findings of the network's efforts.

Big Ocean's leadership and collaboration in meeting the Alliance's *Component 4: Global Enabling Conditions to Scale Up Ocean Conservation* focuses on prioritizing the capacity, resilience and durability of Big Ocean through activities that add value to Alliance site engagements. Big Ocean's membership base and increase capacity-building resources for managers will support and engage LSMPAs that are a part of the Alliance pipeline.

THE EXPERIENCE

Issue

Beyond the numerous ecological, economic and cultural benefits that large-scale MPAs provide, they are an important tool for achieving marine conservation goals such as the 30% by 2030 initiative, which calls

for at least 30% of marine and coastal areas to be conserved by 2030. The vast size of marine managed and protected areas accentuates their inter-governmental and global significance; they can often affect international marine policies in ways that smaller scale MPAs cannot. The UN and other international groups are also exploring the possibility of establishing more MPAs on the high seas in areas beyond national jurisdiction, clearly signaling that large-scale marine conservation is of global importance.

The budding field of large-scale ocean management requires intentional collaboration between researchers, managers and practitioners to build and design a knowledge base for how to protect large swaths of offshore ocean spaces. The activity proposes to solve for this by strengthening connections between and amongst managers and practitioners to address the priority needs of practitioners working on-the-ground globally.

Addressing the Issue

The power of Big Ocean is to act as a neutral convener of diverse audiences and to create "safe spaces" (virtual and live) where practitioners, managers, scientists, and cross-sector partners can share lessons learned, and build capacity and personal relationships in real-time. As the needs of individual sites can vary widely, the network has developed a variety of activities, processes, and products to produce tangible, practical, and actionable outcomes.

Action 1: Hosted and facilitated by Big Ocean, with support from the Blue Nature Alliance, the inaugural LSMPA Managers' 2-day Virtual Summit was held in Fall 2021 with the aim to strengthen connections between and amongst managers and practitioners; to address the priority needs of practitioners actively working in the field globally.

Participants were mainly large-scale marine managed and protected area managers. The second largest group was conservation professionals focused on large scale ocean initiatives, and there were a handful of community representatives. The split between male and female was about 50/50, with about 15 percent of the participants representing (or self identifyfing) as indigenous.

The agenda focused on the needs, challenges ,and priorities of managers. However, as community engagement is a vital element of best practice management, activities related to the importance of understanding and building relationships with rights holders and stakeholders were a key component of the the format and group dialogue.

The first day was entitled ***Where is the field? Calibration across the Community of Practice***. The focus was looking at the current status of sites and core management areas based on survey outcomes. A series of ignite talks were presented that covered the following topics: science and research, sustainable financing, funders and NGOs partnerships, education and outreach, human dimensions, and enabling conditions.

The second day was ***What's Next? Priorities for the future***. Participants were asked to think about how the learnings from Day 1 could be addressed to create more effective management teams that were better able to engage the community and produce durable, resilient sites. When possible, the objective was to develop site-level priorities, and overall, the aim was to collect ideas on how Big Ocean could better serve the broader community of practice, including active site managers.

At the opening of each day, a synthesis of the relevant pre-survey outcomes was presented, and approximately a month after the Summit a final report outlining the design process and outcomes was submitted.

Action 2: Human Dimensions of Large-Scale Marine Protected Area Management Survey

A research group consisting of Rebecca Gruby (Colorado State Univ.), Noella Gray (Univ. Of Guelf), and Lisa Campbell (Duke Univ.) designed the pre-survey that also became the framework for the agenda. The exploratory survey was designed to collect baseline information about the status of LSMPA management

and implementation globally and to inform discussions during the 2021 Summit. The survey included questions about management progress and priorities, and it also asked about how Big Ocean could best serve the LSMPA community of practice. The data reflects the perceptions of survey respondents. The LSMPA community of practice is a small but diverse population, as are the LSMPA sites themselves. Thus, with a relatively small sample size (30 respondents with experience at 15 LSMPAs globally) this survey can provide a starting point for identifying trends or issues across the broader field. Importantly, the survey does not represent the views of the 'field' as a whole. Its results are intended to show the range of views across sites represented in the survey, rather than to generalize to all LSMPA sites.

Results below are from two separate surveys administered online to people who had registered for the Big Ocean Summit, a meeting the Big Ocean Network organized for the Largescale Marine Protected Area community of practice in August 2021. Participants were offered a choice of two surveys and were directed to take the survey that best suited their LSMPA experience: (1) Site-specific survey: designed for people who have in-depth knowledge and/or experience with at least one LSMPA site (2) General survey: designed for people whose knowledge of LSMPAs is more generalized and do not have in-depth knowledge/experience at any particular LSMPA. Results for each survey were summarized separately

RESULTS AND LEARNING

Action 1: LSMPA Managers' Summit Fall 2021 – High-Level Outcomes

1. 85 Participants included LSMPA managers and other site representatives from sites, community members, scholars, and people from the broader community of practice.
2. Members from the 2016 Think Tank on the Human Dimensions of Large-Scale MPAs designed the survey and set the stage for developing a long-term social science dataset.
3. Big Ocean's informal tagline rang true, "Bigger isn't better, but size and scale matter."
4. Of the 17,000 plus MPAs of all sizes globally, 70% of current ocean protection comes from approximately forty-one sites. Therefore, based on this element alone, we must consider effectively and appropriately using the Large-Scale MPA model and better supporting and resourcing managing agencies globally.

Outcomes from Breakouts and Group Discussions:

1. Increased budgets and more effective sustainable financing mechanisms are needed.

a**.** No single LSMPA is fully funded (relatively speaking); current funding mechanisms are inflexible and often built around "high-impact, near-term outputs" versus the actual needs of sites, communities, and managing agencies.

b. A consensus on the "silver lining" is that management teams have become more innovative and partnership-oriented to compensate for inadequate budgets.

2. Understanding the impacts of a site's enabling environment must be prioritized to enhance durability.

a. Being aware of a site's broader context is more critical in places with frequent and highly variable political shifts or for sites (or countries) that have historically challenging relationships with the conservation sector.

3. Supporting a diverse and informed community of practice is essential; building management capacity alone is insufficient.

a. The world of marine conservation, especially at scale, is influenced by a more comprehensive set of variables, and the ability of managers to track emerging trends and stay abreast of critical issues is limited. As a result, a more comprehensive range of expertise is needed to complement peer-to-peer (and community-to-community) learning.

b. Survey responses revealed a disconnect or possible lack of communication or understanding between those working to amplify conservation efforts versus those working on the ground as part of site management teams.

4. Decision-making processes must include Indigenous peoples/communities, customary authorities, and rights holders.

a. Community engagement is a generic term that isn‘t adequate to describe the processes needed to effectively and appropriately include Indigenous peoples/communities, customary authorities, and rights holders. Most approaches have been designed and led by non-indigenous and noncommunity people; this must change.

b. Communities need more support and resources to more effectively engage with managing agencies.

5. Surveying managers regularly and supporting peer-to-peer learning is essential for LSMPAs to be successful long term from both a biophysical and social science perspective.

a. We must broaden our ideas of success and find more nuanced ways to evaluate and interpret responses to questions like, "Do you have sufficient funding ... robust community engagement ... integration of indigenous knowledge ...or strong political support?".

b**.** We must support managers and communities to share experiences and lessons and help design approaches that can help transfer learnings between and amongst sites.

Action 2 : Survey Data Summary

A survey of the global LSMPA community of practice was conducted in the summer of 2021. A report describing key findings was published in September 2021. Key highlights include the following:

1. Overall number of respondents: Site-specific survey: 18 and general survey: 12
2. 30 sites represented across all respondants,
3. 15 sites covered across both surveys
4. There are many common challenges across sites, including budget constraints, staff capacity constraints, limitations for surveillance and enforcement, and insufficient monitoring.
5. The results also highlight some shared bright spots that the community can celebrate, including:
    - Management plans – in place or under development;
    - Conflict decreasing;
    - Political support;
    - Progress towards meeting management objectives,
6. There are shared or common priorities, including increasing budget and moving forward sustainable financing, increasing knowledge and monitoring, building capacity, and addressing equity.
7. Respondents had many good ideas about strategies for moving forward in addressing these priority areas, such as:
    - Diversity funding by building sustainable financing plans;
    - Collaborate to develop research and monitoring;
    - Improve community engagement;
    - Take advantage of learning opportunities in LSMPA network.

Further survey analysis documented in Action 1 above and referenced here:

Gruby, R.L., Gray, N.J., Lewis. N. 2021. Management progress and priorities for large-scale marine protected area management. DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.16699732

REPLICATION

Nearly all elements of the strategy pursued in this case work only when amplification, replicability, and sustainability are at the forefront of the collaborative design process for all tools, products, and approaches. Blue Nature Alliance and Big Ocean partnership to grow the ‘global enabling conditions to scale up ocean conservation’ will only be successful if:

1. Ensure deliverables have a long "shelf life," and co-developped with the next decade in mind.

2. Prioritize clarity of partner roles and expectations to reduce administraive burden by all parties.
3. Strive to solve for knowledge management to maximize outcomes and longevity.
4. Maintain relevance and responsivenes to the field by advocating for donor‘s to embrace a “trust based philanthropic approach. Encourage and cultivate donors‘ investment in outcomes, to be able to shift activities in response to unexpected or evolving needs.
5. Indigenous people‘s, local communities and woman are effectively engaged in the design and implementation of management.
6. Big Ocean‘s long term institutional health is optimized through the pursuit of diversified and innovative funding mechanisms and sustainable funding.

Big Ocean is the only network developed by LSMPA managers, for LSMPA managers that also supports best-practice protocols, peer-learning, and professionalization of the field. The fulfillment of the network’s vision and mission, alongside partnership commitments to the Alliance, will simultaneously enhance the mission of individual LSMPAs and contribute to the durability of the broader field. By partnering to support the network’s durability, and helping to increase its reach and impact, while also amplify the role of large-scale ocean protection and management in achieving 2030 conservation targets, the Alliance aims build communities of practice rooted in people and communities.

Member sites of Big Ocean globally represent 16 nations or territories, covering a total of over 16.6 million sq km of ocean (4.6% of global total). In the coming years, and due in great part to the grant from the Blue Nature Alliance GEF Project, Big Ocean will likely take on at least a dozen new member sites. The size of current LSMPAs range from the 110,149-km2 Lord Howe Commonwealth Marine Reserve (Australia) to the 1.9 million square kilometer Marae Moana marine park in the Cook Islands, however, regardless of total size more nations are establishing sites that encompass their entire Exclusive Economic Zone.

Although only a handful of large-scale MPAs have existed long enough to provide comprehensive advice across all sectors of management, the partnership between Alliance and Big Ocean offers greater opportunities for replication through learning and synergy between and among the full range of communities interested in ocean management at scale. Depending upon what you consider a large MPA the field is between 33 and 41 sites, a five-fold increase since Big Ocean launched. With so many new areas, it is clear that durability and effectiveness will be facilitated by transforming real–world experience into practical guidance that produces well-designed sites, adaptive management regimes, and enhanced ocean governance models.

As technology opens up new possibilities, it will also increase pressures on the ocean. This in turn will likely challenge even the most robust of management regimes. Big Ocean aims to help by adding expertise to the field and to support the development of additional tools and resources for existing and new sites.

SIGNIFICANCE

Summit outcomes made it clear that Big Ocean’s informal tagline, “Bigger isn‘t better but size and scale matter,” is true. Considering 70% of current ocean protection comes from the 41 Large-Scale MPAs globally, we must consider effectively and appropriately using and supporting agencies that are tasked with managing the world's large-scale marine managed areas globally.

Though the past two decades have seen increasing calls for ‘Going Big” with marine protection, there are limited examples of effective long-term governance and management models at scale to reference. By combining and sharing lessons from both mature and recently established large-scale marine managed and protected areas, Big Ocean seeks to support managers to develop, use and refine resources that increase equitable and effective governance, as the foundation of their ongoing, best-practice management.

As the guidance for the design and management of vast ocean areas (including MPAs) is still in development, and the needs of existing sites are not necessarily consistent, the advice Big Ocean

provides is constantly evolving. The future of the field requires adaptive management that is rarely, if ever, implemented in a linear fashion. Thus, the network strives to keep learning and improving upon the services and support it provides to members, partners, communities, and the next generation of ocean champions.

REFERENCES

Learn more at bigoceanmanagers.org
Follow @bigoceanmanager on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
Listen to our podcast, *How to Save an Ocean*, on any platform, including Apple Podcasts and Spotify.
Sign up for our periodic e-newsletter, OPEN OCEAN, at the bottom of this page or the main page of our website.
Request to participate in our listserve, "LSMPA community," by filling out our Google Form application. This is a curated group intended to support the sharing information and lessons learned specific to Large-Scale MPAs and similar marine managed areas.
Considering membership? Want to develop a joint project? Contact our Big Ocean Program Director Nai'a Lewis at naia@bigoceanmanagers.org.

KEYWORDS

What 2-5 keywords could be used to help others search and find this experience note? Please provide at least one of each of the following:

- Regional: Global
- Water Basin: Ocean
- Topical: Learning

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