

MPA DAY

2026 MEDIA TOOLKIT

Ocean Protection Needs Human Connection

1 AUGUST 2026



MARINE PROTECTED AREAS DAY

Endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Action

mpaday.org

#MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Contents

This toolkit is designed to be helpful, easy to navigate and cover almost every conceivable part of a communications strategy for those involved with MPA Day. Please pick the sections you need, adapt them to your context and share them with your team.

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1. Background: what is MPA Day

MPA Day is celebrated every year on 1 August. It's a global day dedicated to raising awareness about marine protected areas and their role in ocean conservation, sustainable development and community well-being.

A group of South African organisations launched MPA Day in 2021 to fill a gap among the world's environmental days. None of them focused specifically on MPAs.

The date commemorates the legal protection of 20 new or expanded MPAs in South Africa on 1 August 2019. In one move, South Africa increased its MPA coverage from 0.4% to 5.4%.

Since then, MPA Day has grown into an international movement endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Activity. Global partners now include HELCOM and PROTECT BALTIC, and Mission Blue.

The European Union through the PROTECT BALTIC project and Cape Town's Two Oceans Aquarium provided financial support for the MPA Day website and media team.

2. What are marine protected areas?

Marine protected areas are clearly defined parts of the ocean or coastline specially designated and managed to protect marine life and nature. They're often called the national parks of the sea.

By limiting harmful activities and allowing nature to recover, MPAs help ensure marine environments can keep providing vital benefits for today and for future generations. These include food, coastal protection, clean water and climate regulation.

But to deliver on this promise, MPAs must be more than paper parks. They need effective management, adequate funding and community involvement. That's what turns a line on a map into a living sanctuary.

Unless we act now to protect these areas, many of the ocean's most special habitats and species may disappear before our children and grandchildren have a chance to experience them.

3. Five key messages for 2026

Use these messages in your communications, social media posts, speeches and media interviews. Adapt the wording to suit your audience and region.

Message 1: MPAs work

When marine protected areas are well managed, marine life recovers. Fish populations grow. Coral rebounds. Ecosystems rebuild. The science is clear: MPAs deliver measurable results for biodiversity and for the communities who depend on healthy oceans.

Message 2: The 30x30 target demands urgency

The world has committed to protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030. We're not on track. MPA Day is a reminder that this target requires action from every country, every coastline and every community with a connection to the sea.

Message 3: Local action creates global impact

Every beach cleanup, every school visit, every community event on MPA Day adds to a worldwide wave of awareness. You don't need a big budget or a boat. You just need a willingness to show up for the ocean, wherever you are.

Message 4: MPAs protect people too

MPAs help coastal communities stay safe by preserving mangroves and kelp forests that reduce storm damage and erosion. They safeguard cultural heritage and national monuments that communities identify with and pass on to future generations. They also support food security and jobs. When we protect the ocean, we protect ourselves.

Message 5: Paper parks aren't enough

Declaring an MPA is the beginning, not the end. Effective management, adequate funding and community involvement are what turn a line on a map into a living, breathing sanctuary. MPA Day celebrates the areas getting it right.

4. Facts and figures

Use these statistics in your communications.

50%+ of the world's oxygen comes from the ocean	30% of human CO2 absorbed by the ocean
20 new South African MPAs proclaimed in 2019	3.4% of the ocean fully or highly protected
30% of ocean to be protected by 2030 (30x30 goal)	10 % total area covered by some sort of protection
39 countries celebrated MPA Day 2025	3 billion+ people depend on seafood for protein

5. Audience-specific messaging

Adapt your language and angle depending on who you're talking to. Here are tailored approaches for seven audiences.

Policymakers and government officials

Lead with data and economic value. Emphasise job creation and job protection, livelihoods, the 30x30 commitment, the economic worth of ecosystem services MPAs provide (coastal protection, fisheries sustainability, tourism revenue) and the reputational benefits of meeting international biodiversity targets. Reference the UN Ocean Decade endorsement.

Media and journalists

Offer a local angle. Connect MPA Day to a nearby MPA, a species recovery story or a community event. Provide ready-to-use statistics, high-resolution images and access to spokespeople. Keep pitches short and factual. Lead with the news, not the background.

Schools and educators

Frame MPAs as living classrooms. Tie content to curriculum areas: biology, geography, environmental science and citizenship. Offer age-appropriate activities such as tidal pool treasure hunts, virtual MPA tours and art competitions. Use species stories for emotional connection.

General public

Build wonder and personal connection. Use striking images, species stories and local relevance. Avoid jargon. Explain what an MPA is in one sentence: the national parks of the sea. Give people a simple action they can take the same day.

Fishing communities

Acknowledge the complex relationship between fishers and MPAs. Lead with evidence of fisheries benefits: spillover effects where fish populations inside MPAs grow and replenish surrounding waters. Share stories of fishing communities who've seen catches improve after MPA establishment. Respect local knowledge and invite participation.

Tourism operators

Emphasise the link between healthy marine environments and tourism revenue. Snorkelling, diving, whale watching and coastal walks all depend on the biodiversity MPAs protect. Offer co-branding opportunities and encourage tourism businesses to host or sponsor MPA Day events.

Corporate partners

Position MPA Day as a credible, UN-endorsed platform for ocean-related sustainability commitments. Offer partnership tiers, co-branding guidelines, measurable reach data and sponsorships wherever possible.

6. Social media sample posts

Copy, paste and adapt. Replace text in [BRACKETS] with your local details.

Awareness

Post 1

MPA Day 2026 is coming up on 1 August! Marine protected areas are the national parks of the sea. They protect marine life, support communities and help our ocean recover. How are you celebrating? #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Post 2

Did you know? The world has committed to protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030. Marine protected areas are how we get there. This MPA Day, find out about the MPA nearest to you. #MPADay #30x30

Post 3

Marine protected areas aren't just about conservation. The kelp forests they support protect coastlines from storms, spillover from healthier fish stocks support fishing livelihoods and cultural heritage sites are preserved. When we protect the ocean, we protect ourselves. #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Event promotion

Post 4

Join us on 1 August for [EVENT NAME] at [LOCATION]! We're celebrating MPA Day with [ACTIVITY]. Everyone is welcome. Details: [LINK] #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Post 5

This MPA Day, we're heading to [YOUR MPA] for a [beach cleanup / snorkel / tidal pool walk / film screening]. Come celebrate the ocean with us. Register: [LINK] #MPADay

Call for artists

Post 6

For #MPADay2026, we're celebrating artists across the globe who are turning creativity into a force for ocean protection. If the sea fuels your creativity, share your work using #MPACreativeWaves and tag @MPADay

Call for runners

Post 7

Stride out for the sea this MPA Day. We're encouraging runners across the world to join the @Strava challenge. Share your run. Use #Run4MPAs. Tag @MPADay. Spread the wave!

Call for surfers

Post 8

Share the #MPADay stoke! Surfers around the world are encouraged to paddle out and catch some waves. Take pictures on the beach. Use #Surf4MPAs. Tell us what the sea means to you. #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Call for divers

Post 9

Addicted to life below the waves? Join us on 1 August for [A SCUBA DIVE] / [A FREEDIVE] at [LOCATION]! We're celebrating MPA Day by [ACTIVITY]. Everyone is welcome. Details: [LINK] #Dive4MPAs #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Call for cyclists

Post 10

Pedal for protection this #MPADay! Hit the road, chase the coastline, climb the hills, or cruise your favourite route in support of healthy oceans and protected marine spaces. Use #Cycle4MPAs. Snap your ride, share your view, and tell us why the sea matters to you. #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Post-event

Post 11

What a day! [NUMBER] people joined us at [LOCATION] to celebrate MPA Day 2026. Together we [ACHIEVEMENT]. Thank you to everyone who showed up for the ocean. #MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

7. Platform-specific guidance

Instagram (@marineprotectedareasday)

Best formats: Reels (30-90 seconds for maximum reach in 2026), carousels (up to 20 slides) and Stories. Instagram's algorithm favours Reels over static posts, so prioritise short video. Use high-quality vertical video (9:16) or square images. Keep captions conversational and end with a question or call to action. Place 3-5 hashtags in the caption (Instagram no longer recommends hiding them in comments). Tag @marineprotectedareasday. Stories with polls, quizzes and countdown stickers to 1 August drive engagement.

Facebook (@MPASouthAfrica)

Best formats: event pages, short video (under 3 minutes) and photo albums. Create a Facebook Event for your MPA Day activity and invite your community. Facebook prioritises video and content that sparks conversation, so ask questions in your posts. Longer captions work well here. Share links to mpaday.org and tag @MPASouthAfrica. Facebook Groups are useful for coordinating regional efforts. Reels on Facebook are also gaining reach.

LinkedIn (MPA Day)

Best format: text with a single strong image. Document-style carousel PDFs also perform well for sharing data and infographics. Write for a professional audience: conservation managers, policymakers, CSR professionals. Lead with data or a policy angle. Posts between 1,200-1,500 characters tend to get the most engagement. Avoid emoji-heavy copy. Tag the MPA Day company page.

TikTok (@mpa.day)

Best format: vertical video, 30-60 seconds for broadest reach. TikTok's algorithm rewards content regardless of follower count, making it ideal for new accounts. Show, don't tell: underwater footage, species close-ups, event behind-the-scenes and coastal timelapses all perform well. Use trending audio. Keep text overlays brief and readable. Humour and wonder both work. Post consistently in the week leading up to MPA Day to build momentum.

X (formerly Twitter)

Best format: short punchy posts with one stat or one image. Threads work for longer stories. Posts with images get significantly more engagement than text-only. Use #MPADay and #LetsTalkMPAs in every post. Tag relevant accounts. Repost and engage with other MPA Day participants throughout the day. The character limit is 280 for standard accounts.

8. Hashtag recommendations

Primary (use in every post)

#MPADay #LetsTalkMPAs

Secondary (use where relevant)

#MPADayCreativeWaves #Run4MPAs #Surf4MPAs #Dive4MPAs #Cycle4MPAs

#MarineProtectedAreas #30x30 #OceanDecade #ProtectTheOcean #MarineConservation
#OceanAction

Regional (adapt to your area or affiliation)

#MPADaySouthAfrica #MPADayEurope #HopeSpots #ProtectBaltic #MediterraneanMPA

9. Visual identity and colour palette

Use the brand guidelines as set out in the resources hub at <https://mpaday.org/resources-hub>.

10. Logo and brand guidelines

Please use the logo and brand guidelines as set out in the resources hub at <https://mpaday.org/resources-hub>.

11. Downloadable graphics guidance

Please check the resources hub for downloadable assets at <https://mpaday.org/resources-hub>.

12. Press release template

Adapt this template for your local media. Replace all text in [BRACKETS] with your details.

Press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE]

[YOUR ORGANISATION] celebrates Marine Protected Areas Day 2026

[CITY, COUNTRY] – On 1 August 2026, [YOUR ORGANISATION] will join communities around the world in celebrating MPA Day, a global day dedicated to raising awareness about marine protected areas.

[Describe your event or activity in 2-3 sentences. Include location, time and what participants can expect.]

MPA Day was founded in South Africa in 2021 and is endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Activity. It's celebrated on 1 August each year, the date South Africa proclaimed 20 new or expanded MPAs in 2019.

[Include a quote from your spokesperson.]

For more information, visit mpaday.org or contact [NAME] at [EMAIL/PHONE].

ENDS

Media contact: [INSERT PRESS EMAIL]

Images available on request.

13. All-purpose email template

Use this for invitations, partner outreach or general promotion. Adapt the subject line and body to your purpose.

Email template

Subject: Join us for MPA Day 2026 – 1 August

Dear [NAME],

MPA Day is a global celebration of marine protected areas, held every year on 1 August. Endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Activity, it brings together communities, organisations and governments to raise awareness and inspire action for ocean protection.

This year, [DESCRIBE WHAT YOU'RE DOING / WHAT YOU'RE INVITING THEM TO DO].

[Include one or two key facts: e.g. the world has committed to protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030, and MPAs are the primary tool for getting there.]

We'd love you to [register your event / join us / share the message / partner with us]. Visit mpaday.org for resources, toolkits and event registration.

Best regards,

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR ORGANISATION]

[YOUR CONTACT DETAILS]

14. Video and multimedia assets

These video resources are publicly available and can be shared or screened at MPA Day events:

- MPA Day YouTube channel: [youtube.com/@mpaday2219](https://www.youtube.com/@mpaday2219)
- MPA Day 2025 video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dWROVm2USc>
- OCTO webinar: 'MPA Day 2026: Uniting a Global Community for Ocean Protection' featuring Dr Judy Mann-Lang and Katja Laingui (February 2026)
- Dr Bruce Mann's MPA zonation explainer series (4 videos covering South Africa's MPA boundaries and regulations)

If you create video content for MPA Day, please upload it to the MPA Day Media Repository (see Section 21) so it can be shared across the network.

15. Available experts and spokespeople

Contact the MPA Day team for media interviews, panel discussions and event appearances.

Katja Laingui

European Coordinator, MPA Day

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) | PROTECT BALTIC project

Email: katja.laingui@helcom.fi

Paul Trouth

European Coordinator, MPA Day

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) | PROTECT BALTIC project

Email: paul.trouth@helcom.fi

Dr Judy Mann-Lang

Founder of MPA Day

Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation | IUCN Behaviour Change Task Force | International Zoo Educators Board

Email: judy@aquariumfoundation.org.za

16. Event hosting ideas

MPA Day events can be as simple or ambitious as your resources allow. Here are some ideas:

- Beach or underwater cleanup at or near an MPA or inland at rivers and lakes
- Guided tidal pool walk or snorkel with a local marine biologist
- Film screening (e.g. Mission Blue, My Octopus Teacher, Ocean) followed by a Q&A
- Virtual tour of an MPA, broadcast live or pre-recorded
- School workshop: 'What lives in MPAs?' with specimens, images or art activities
- Aquarium or marine centre open day with MPA-themed talks
- Art challenge: 'Creative Waves' inviting ocean-inspired artworks from the community
- Speaker event or panel with marine scientists or MPA managers
- Citizen science activity: biodiversity survey, photo transect or iNaturalist bioblitz
- Coastal or inland hike or a paddle helping people connect to water
- Photography competition showcasing marine life
- A scuba diving or freediving event inland or in the ocean

- A Discover Scuba day to introduce new people to the activity
- A surfing or running event if conditions allow

Please register your event at mpaday.org/get-involved so it appears on the global map.

17. Species spotlight

Species stories make conservation personal. Use these profiles, or select a species from your area, as part of your communications to give your audience a creature to care about.

African penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*)

The African penguin is the only penguin species breeding on the African continent. Found along the coasts of South Africa and Namibia, it's classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN. Populations have declined by more than 99% since the early 1900s, driven by egg collection, habitat loss, oil spills, declining fish stocks, marine noise pollution and climate change.

Several South African MPAs protect key penguin breeding and foraging sites. These waddling, monogamous birds mate for life and have a salt gland above their eyes. When they shake their heads, they're shaking salt water out of their noses.

MPA Day connection: African penguins are a flagship species for South African MPAs and a powerful symbol of why marine protection matters.

Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (*Sousa plumbea*)

The Indian Ocean humpback dolphin is one of the most endangered dolphin species on the planet. Found in shallow coastal waters from South Africa to India, it's classified as Endangered by the IUCN. Fewer than 500 are estimated to remain in South African waters.

These dolphins live close to shore, which makes them particularly vulnerable to coastal development, pollution, boat strikes and fishing nets. They prefer sheltered bays, estuaries and waters near coral reefs. Their name comes from a distinctive hump beneath the dorsal fin.

MPA Day connection: the humpback dolphin is a barometer for coastal MPA health. If the water is clean enough and quiet enough for these dolphins, the rest of the ecosystem is probably in decent shape too.

Vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*)

The vaquita is the world's most endangered marine mammal. Fewer than 10 individuals are believed to remain. Found only in the northern Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) in Mexico, this small porpoise is on the very edge of extinction.

The primary threat is entanglement in illegal gillnets set for another endangered species, the totoaba fish, whose swim bladder is trafficked on the black market. Despite the Vaquita Refuge, a designated protected area in the upper Gulf, illegal fishing continues. The vaquita reaches about 1.5 metres long and has distinctive dark rings around its eyes.

MPA Day connection: the vaquita is a stark warning about what happens when protection exists on paper but not in practice. It's the most extreme example of why enforcement and community engagement matter as much as the designation itself.

North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*)

The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most critically endangered large whales in the world. Fewer than 350 individuals remain. They migrate along the eastern seaboard of North America, from calving grounds off Florida and Georgia to feeding areas in the Gulf of Maine and Canadian waters.

Right whales were named by whalers who considered them the 'right' whale to hunt: they swam slowly, floated when killed and yielded large quantities of oil and baleen. Today, their biggest threats are vessel strikes and entanglement in fishing gear, particularly lobster and crab pot lines.

MPA Day connection: the right whale shows how MPAs must adapt to protect migratory species. Seasonal speed restrictions and shifting protected zones in US and Canadian waters are examples of dynamic MPA management responding to where these whales actually are, not where maps say they should be.

Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

The hawksbill turtle is classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN. Found in tropical and subtropical oceans worldwide, hawksbills are vital to coral reef health because they feed on sponges, preventing them from outcompeting reef-building corals.

Their beautiful shell, made up of overlapping scales called 'scutes', has been their curse. Centuries of harvesting for the tortoiseshell trade decimated populations. Today, habitat loss, pollution, climate change and illegal trade remain serious threats. Hawksbills nest on beaches across the tropics and protecting nesting sites through MPAs is critical to their survival.

MPA Day connection: the hawksbill is a reminder that some species hold entire ecosystems together. Protect the turtle, protect the reef. MPAs covering nesting beaches and foraging reefs are a direct lifeline for this species.

Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*)

The Mediterranean monk seal is one of the rarest marine mammals on Earth. Around 800 individuals remain. It was classified as Endangered for decades before being reclassified as Vulnerable in 2023 after small population increases in Greece and Turkey.

These seals once ranged across the entire Mediterranean, Black Sea and the Atlantic coast of northwest Africa. Today, the largest populations survive in the Aegean Sea, where MPAs in the Northern Sporades and around Gyaros island provide protected breeding habitat. They depend on sea caves for pupping.

MPA Day connection: the monk seal is a European MPA success story. Its slow recovery shows what's possible when protected areas are properly managed and enforced. As MPA Day expands into Europe, the monk seal is a living reminder of why these protections matter.

18. Partner and sponsor acknowledgement

If you're referencing MPA Day in your communications or hosting an MPA Day event, we'd appreciate you following these guidelines:

- Use the full name 'Marine Protected Areas Day' on first reference. 'MPA Day' is fine after that.
- Always include the date: 1 August.
- Include #MPADay and #LetsTalkMPAs in social media posts.
- Where space allows, note the UN Ocean Decade endorsement: 'MPA Day is endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Activity.'
- Mission Blue is a major international partner for MPA Day. Where relevant, acknowledge Mission Blue's involvement and their Hope Spots network. Mission Blue joined the MPA Day cause in 2024, helping promote celebrations across many Hope Spots worldwide.
- The Two Oceans Aquarium is a co-funder of MPA Day 2026. Please acknowledge this where appropriate.
- Don't imply endorsement by the United Nations. The UN Ocean Decade endorsement applies to MPA Day as a Decade Activity. Use of the UN Decade logo by non-UN entities doesn't imply endorsement of those entities.

19. Calls to action

Every communication should end with a clear ask. Use one or more of these or create your own:

Register your event

Hosting an MPA Day event? Register it at mpaday.org/get-involved so it appears on the global map and reaches a wider audience.

Share on social media

Post about MPA Day using #MPADay and #LetsTalkMPAs. Share a photo of your local MPA, a species you love or the reason the ocean matters to you.

Visit a local MPA

If you're near the coast, spend time in or near a marine protected area on 1 August. Walk the shore. Snorkel. Watch the birds. Connect with what we're protecting.

20. Measurement and reporting

After MPA Day, we want to hear what happened. Reporting back helps the MPA Day team measure global impact, tell the story of the day and plan for future years.

What to track

- Number of attendees at your event
- Social media reach and engagement (impressions, likes, shares, comments)
- Media coverage (articles, broadcast mentions, interviews)
- Photographs and video from events
- Qualitative feedback: what worked, what people said, what surprised you. This is especially important. And if you have short video clips of people talking about MPA Day, we'd love to see them.

Where to report

Upload your photos, videos and media coverage to the MPA Day Media Repository:

[MPA Day Media Repository \(Notion\)](#)

(<https://www.notion.so/MPA-Day-Media-Repository-32749c3834a0814fbe78e26837bac61a>)

If you have questions about reporting, contact the MPA Day team at info@mpaday.org

21. Contact

Website mpaday.org	Media enquiries info@mpaday.org	Social media FB: @MPASouthAfrica IG: @marineprotectedareasday LinkedIn: MPA Day TikTok: @mpa.day YouTube: @mpaday2219
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Endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a Decade Activity

Co-funded by the European Union through the PROTECT BALTIC project
and by the Two Oceans Aquarium