

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS DAY

“Ocean protection needs human connection”

WHAT IS MARINE PROTECTED AREA DAY?

MPA Day, celebrated annually on **1 August**, is a global observance dedicated to raising awareness about **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** and their crucial role in ocean conservation, sustainable development, and community well-being.

Launched in 2021 by a consortium of South African organisations, MPA Day was created to fill a gap among the world's many environmental observances – none of which focused specifically on MPAs. The date was chosen to commemorate the **legal protection of 20 new or expanded MPAs in South Africa on 1 August 2019**, a significant milestone in marine conservation.

Since its inception, MPA Day has grown into an **international movement**, endorsed by the United Nations Ocean Decade and supported by individuals, communities, institutions, and governments around the world. The day complements global initiatives like World Oceans Day by shining a focused spotlight on MPAs and their unique contributions to preserving marine biodiversity, supporting fisheries, boosting local economies, and enhancing climate resilience.

Despite their importance, MPAs remain relatively unknown to much of the public and even many decision-makers. MPA Day seeks to change that by:

- Increasing public understanding and appreciation of MPAs.
- Inspiring communities, schools, and organisations to engage with marine protection.
- Highlighting the role of MPAs in achieving global ocean conservation goals.
- Encouraging stronger political and financial support for ocean protection.
- Sharing science, stories, and successes on social media through **#MPADay** and **#LetsTalkMPAs**.

By celebrating MPA Day, we acknowledge that protecting the ocean is not just a coastal concern – it is a **shared global responsibility**. Whether we live by the sea or far inland, the ocean sustains all life on Earth. MPA Day reminds us that through awareness and action, we can help ensure a healthy, thriving ocean for generations to come.

WHAT ARE MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAS)?

A **Marine Protected Area (MPA)** is a clearly defined part of the ocean or coastline that is specially designated and managed to protect marine life and nature. Often called the **national parks** of the sea, MPAs are essential for maintaining ocean health, supporting marine biodiversity, and ensuring long-term sustainability of the ocean's resources.







By limiting harmful activities and allowing nature to recover and thrive, MPAs help to ensure that marine environments can continue to provide vital benefits – not just for today, but for future generations.








To truly deliver on this promise, MPAs must be **more than just paper parks**; they need effective management and enforcement to provide real, tangible benefits for biodiversity and the communities that rely on healthy oceans.

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

The ecosystem services provided by MPAs – like food, coastal protection, clean water, and climate regulation – are irreplaceable, and their loss would mean depriving future generations of a healthy marine environment and all it sustains.

MPAs play a wide range of critical roles:

PROTECTING MARINE BIODIVERSITY	SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES	RESTORING OCEAN HEALTH	PRESERVING CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE	PROVIDING POWERFUL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	BOOSTING TOURISM AND RECREATION
					
Safeguarding diverse ecosystems, habitats, and species, helping to preserve our planet's natural heritage	Allowing fish populations to recover and grow, MPAs improve catches in nearby areas and ensure long-term food	Allowing degraded habitats to recover, supporting healthier and more resilient marine ecosystems	Many MPAs protect shipwrecks, sacred sites, and traditional ways of life linked to the sea	Serving as outdoor classrooms where people of all ages can learn about marine science and conservation	Healthy marine environments attract visitors, supporting eco-tourism and local economies

INSPIRING AND CONNECTING US TO NATURE 	ADVANCING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH 	PROTECTING COASTLINES 	SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS 	OFFERING SOURCES OF NEW DISCOVERIES 	STRENGTHENING CLIMATE RESILIENCE 	PROMOTING FAIR AND INCLUSIVE OCEAN GOVERNANCE 
<p>Fostering a sense of wonder, reflection, and spiritual connection with the ocean</p>	<p>As living laboratories, MPAs offer vital insights into marine ecosystems and how they respond to environmental changes</p>	<p>MPAs help buffer coastal communities from storm surges, erosion, and rising seas</p>	<p>Creating long-term employment in tourism, conservation, research, and sustainable resource management</p>	<p>Protecting species and ecosystems that may lead to breakthroughs in medicine, technology, and other fields</p>	<p>Helping ecosystems adapt to climate change by conserving critical habitats like coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses</p>	<p>Supporting decision-making that balances environmental, social, and economic priorities</p>

WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

MPA Day is a global initiative that aims to raise awareness, inspire action, and foster appreciation for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the ocean among people around the world. Through strategic, inclusive, positive and uplifting communication, MPA Day seeks to make ocean conservation personal, meaningful, and accessible – connecting the health of the sea to the well-being of humanity.

Our messaging is grounded in facts and positive stories, showcasing the tangible benefits of MPAs and the beauty of marine ecosystems. By focusing on hope, success, and shared responsibility, we aim to empower people and communities to take action.

MPA Day communications are designed to:



Introduce people to our incredible marine heritage

Highlighting the beauty, diversity, and ecological importance of marine life and habitats.



Emphasise the ocean's vital role in sustaining life

Showing how healthy oceans support food security, regulate the climate, preserve cultural identity, and provide economic opportunities.



Focus on the human benefits of MPAs

Demonstrating how well-managed MPAs protect marine resources that coastal communities and future generations depend on.



Promote responsible ocean stewardship

Advocating for MPAs as essential tools for sustainability, resilience to climate change, and equitable access to marine resources.



Frame the conversation around people, not just the planet

Making the value of MPAs relevant to everyday lives by connecting ocean conservation with human needs, values, and livelihoods.



Build public and political support for MPAs

Creating a shared sense of responsibility and encouraging stronger commitments from individuals, communities, governments, and civil society.

WHO DO WE WANT TO REACH?

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To effectively raise awareness and build support for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), MPA Day communication will be tailored to:

General public

- Individuals of all ages and backgrounds, especially those unfamiliar with MPAs.
- Coastal communities, as well as inland audiences who may not realise their connection to the ocean.
- Visitors to MPAs, aquariums, science centres, museums, and other informal education venues.

Objective: Inspire interest, build appreciation, and promote responsible ocean stewardship.

Policy and decision makers

- Government officials, agencies, and international bodies responsible for marine policy.

Objective: Build political will, influence marine conservation policy, and increase support for MPA expansion and enforcement.

Educators and learners

- Teachers, students, and youth organisations at all levels.

Objective: Foster ocean awareness and empathy, and encourage the next generation to value and protect marine environments.

Cultural leaders

- Cultural custodians, religious and spiritual communities, where relevant, with ties to the ocean.

Objective: Engage values-based audiences with tailored messaging that connects marine protection to ethics, stewardship, and heritage.

MPA stakeholders

- MPA managers and practitioners – those directly responsible for MPA governance and implementation.
- Scientists and researchers – contributors to marine knowledge and monitoring.
- Conservationists and NGOs – active advocates for marine protection.
- Resource users – including both consumptive users (e.g. fishers) and non-consumptive users (e.g. divers, eco-tourists).
- Local businesses and industry – especially those linked to the blue economy or affected by MPA policies.

Objective: Encourage collaboration, knowledge exchange, and best practices for effective and equitable MPA management.

Media and communication multipliers

- Journalists, influencers, and digital content creators who help amplify messages to wider audiences.

Objective: Equip media with compelling, accurate content to inform and inspire their audiences about MPAs and ocean issues.

KEY MESSAGES

MPAs are just as important as national parks on land — they safeguard some of the most extraordinary and valuable parts of our ocean.

MPAs protect incredible marine biodiversity — from coral reefs and kelp forests to fish, seabirds, and marine mammals, these areas are home to species and ecosystems found nowhere else.

Healthy MPAs mean healthy oceans and healthy people — by protecting marine life, MPAs support food security, livelihoods, climate resilience, and cultural values, now and for future generations.

MPAs are places for connection, learning, and inspiration — they offer unique opportunities to explore nature, enjoy the sea, and discover more about our planet.

Your support matters — visiting, learning about, and speaking up for MPAs helps ensure their long-term protection and benefits for all.

That's the power of **local actions for global impact** – when we protect our piece of the ocean, we help safeguard the entire blue planet for future generations.

It's up to each one of us to help ensure that parts of our ocean are protected for future generations.

RESOURCES

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