Research Brief

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Photo credit: Erik Lukas / Ocean Image Bank

Distinguishing Marine Spatial Planning and Marine Protected Area Planning

Two management processes widely used around the globe, MSP and MPA planning, are key for sustainability in a changing ocean, but are not one and the same.

Background

Marine spatial planning (MSP) and marine protected area (MPA) planning are two distinct area-based management processes used worldwide to support sustainable ocean use and conservation. While MSP and MPA planning share a variety of similarities, they target different goals and objectives, and use different methodologies, tools, and practitioner skillsets. Although they are perceived very differently by ocean users, decision-makers, and the general public, MSP and MPA planning concepts are often used interchangeably in multiple contexts, leading to confusion, conflict, and missed opportunities to support a sustainable ocean for all.

Marine Spatial Planning

MSP is a multi-sectoral and multi-objective public process. It involves analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives. MSP seeks to integrate all existing and emergent human uses, minimising conflicts and fostering compatibility among them, as well as between such uses and the environment. MSP involves creating a shared vision for the future across many divergent viewpoints and aspirations, from multiple stakeholders and sectors.

Marine Protected Area Planning

MPA planning is a management process focused explicitly on biodiversity protection and meeting conservation goals. MPAs are clearly defined geographical spaces that are recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. There is a 'continuum' of MPAs allowing differing degrees of human use, from 'fully protected' to 'multiple-use'. Various types of MPAs all aim to limit uses that are destructive or incompatible with nature protection.

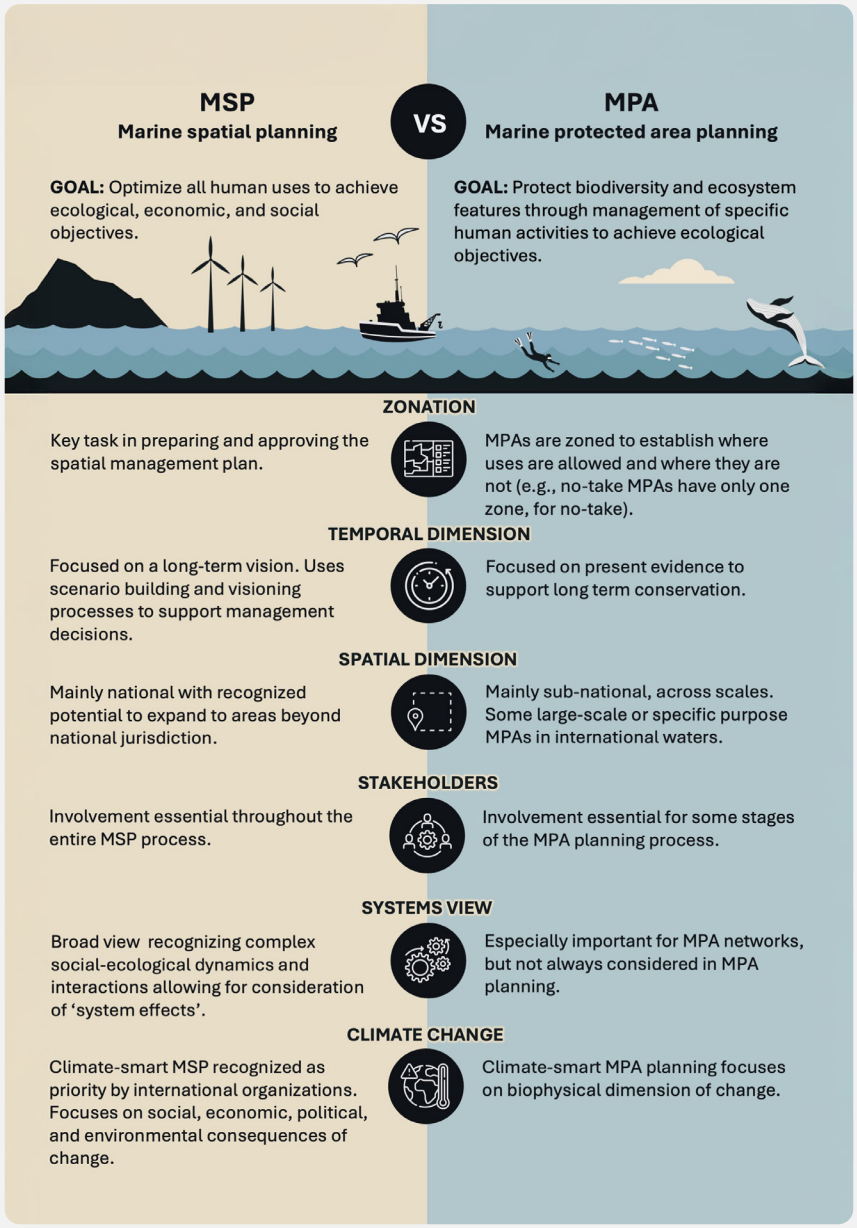
Points for Policymakers

Decision-makers, managers, and practitioners could consider the following points to leveraging synergies between MSP and MPA planning and moving toward sustainability in a changing ocean.

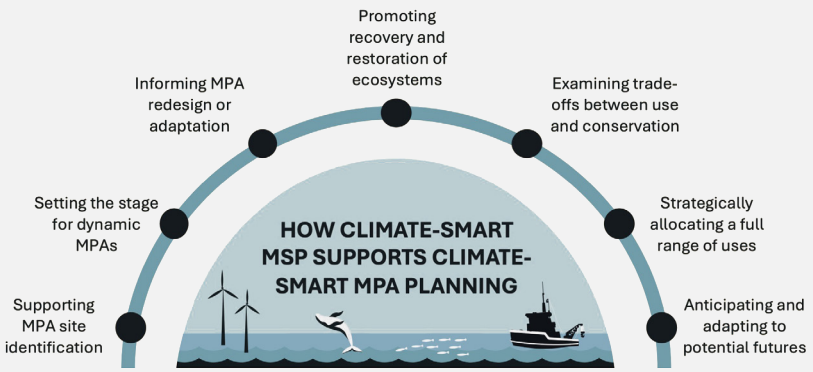
- **Several aspects set apart MSP and MPA planning such as** the use of zonation, scale (temporal and spatial), stakeholder involvement, ability to take a systems view, and integration of climate change considerations.
- **While recognising differences, planners and managers should use MSP and MPA planning synergistically** and integrate them to support ocean sustainability under dramatic and rapid change.
- **The broader scope of MSP offers opportunities to expand MPA planning,** by considering pressures beyond boundaries of protection, ensuring conservation interests have a seat at the table, mediating conflicts.
- **Incorporating MPA planning into MSP can ensure a central emphasis on ocean health,** boosting biodiversity protection, and contributing to global sustainability commitments as from the Global Biodiversity Framework, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, or the High Seas Treaty (i.e., BBNJ Agreement).
- **Climate-smart MSP can advance MPA planning through multiple pathways** from supporting MPA site identification to setting the stage for dynamic MPA's, informing MPA redesign and adaptation, promoting ecosystem recovery and restoration, examining trade-offs between use and conservation, strategically allocating ocean uses, and anticipating and adapting to potential futures.

MSP and MPA Planning in a Changing Climate

As the world moves to incorporate climate change considerations into planning, the lack of clarity around these distinct approaches can lead to further confusion and limit our pathways to sustainable solutions. To ensure progress towards the latter, it is fundamental to dispel confusion and provide a clear pathway for practitioners to adopt 'climate-smart' approaches in MSP and MPA planning practices.



Key differences between MSP and MPA planning.



How climate-smart MSP can support climate-smart MPA planning.

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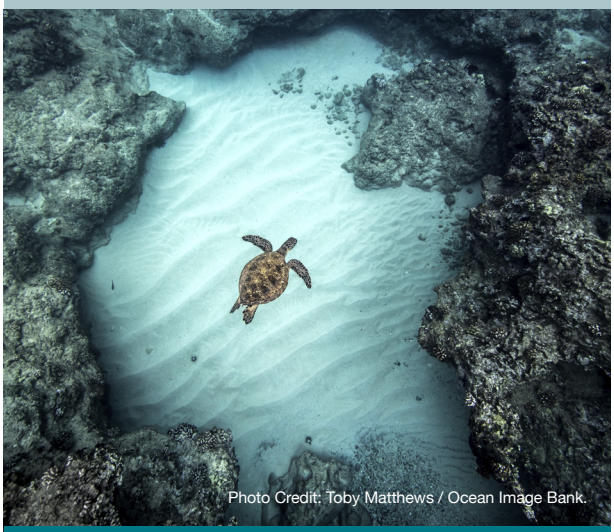

Photo Credit: Toby Matthews / Ocean Image Bank.

This brief is based on **Marine spatial planning and marine protected area planning are not the same and both are key for sustainability in a changing ocean** published in *npj Ocean Sustainability.*
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More Information

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