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Marine Reserves Not Keeping Pace

By Erik Stokstad
ScienceNOW Daily News
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WASHINGTON, D.C.--Nations need to dramatically speed up the creation of marine protected areas if they are to meet international goals for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, scientists said today at a meeting here of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), an international nongovernmental group.

Marine protected areas are reserves where the ecosystem is being managed to conserve biodiversity, for example by limiting or banning fishing. Often, overexploited fish species begin to recover there, helping to boost stocks outside the area as well. Louisa Wood, a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre in Vancouver, Canada, has spent the last several

Not enough.

More protected areas, such as Elkhorn Slough in California, are needed to meet targets for conserving biodiversity.

Credit: NOAA

years assembling a database of some 4600 reserves that meet the IUCN definition of a marine protected area. Her study, in press at *Oryx*, shows that the area of reserves has been increasing by about 5% a year over the last 2 decades.

That's not going to be enough, Wood and others said. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)--a global treaty for the conservation of biodiversity--has the goal of protecting 10% of the world's economic exclusive zone (the region offshore controlled by each country) by 2010. And the World Summit on Sustainable Development agreed in 2002 to place 20% of the world's oceans under protection by 2010. Wood's findings show that to meet those goals, the total area of marine reserves will have to grow by 50% each year--a 10-fold jump in rate. "The point is to make explicit the mismatch between what we're doing and what needs to be done," Wood said.

At the current rate, it would take until 2045 to designate enough reserves to meet the CBD goal, and until 2074 to meet the target for sustainable development. However, because marine species are being so rapidly depleted, there isn't really that much time, noted oceanographer Sylvia Earle. "If we don't do something now, we will forever lose the chance." Dan Laffoley of the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas, which helped fund the database, said of the analysis: "It brings it home when you see it like this. We're way off target."

Related sites

- [More information about the IUCN meeting](#)
- [The Marine Protected Areas Global database](#)
- [Guidelines for Marine Protected Areas, an IUCN publication](#)

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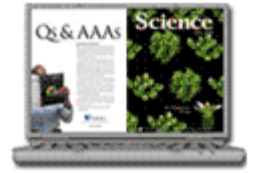
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