



Global Marine Programme

Restoring the balance

Safeguarding Sensitive Habitats and Species

Milestone 1.3 - Managing External Threats

Agreements, policies or mechanisms (through government, industry or community agreements) that clearly and specifically protect sensitive marine habitats or species from key external threats, such as climate change, are put in place, including in all focal marine ecoregions by 2007.

Industrial Activities Threaten the Oceans

The marine environment has never before been under such heavy pressure from pollution, habitat destruction and modification, fisheries depletion, tourism development, and other negative impacts. Human activities pose the biggest threat to the marine environment, from oil and gas extraction, shipping, aquaculture, overfishing, tourism and, in the long term, climate change.

While several industry sectors contribute to the degradation of the marine environment, WWF has chosen to focus its activities on key sectors where the threats are the most significant and where WWF has the expertise to provide solutions for the future.

We work with the aquaculture, shipping and tourism sectors to forge agreements on the best practices the industries should pursue, the sustainability issues they must address, and how these industries should act in and around sensitive marine areas.

Additionally, we are working to decrease the impacts of other threats to sensitive marine areas.



School of bumphead parrotfish in the Great Barrier Reef no-take zone that was expanded to cover 33 per cent of the GBR Marine Park area in 2004.



© WWF-Canon / Jan VAN DE KAM

The Wadden Sea, Germany, is a vulnerable sea, with many human activities affecting its habitats and species like the harbour seal. It has been designated as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area by the IMO.

How We Work

WWF is working to safeguard sensitive seas and species by promoting specific activities, including:

- Establishing sectoral or community management zones, i.e. oil and gas exclusion zones, aquaculture-free zones or tourism-regulated zones, to protect vulnerable areas from the threats of oil extraction, aquaculture and tourism development.
- Establishing time area closures and no-take zones for fisheries to protect from overfishing.
- Advocating for the adoption of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) in areas particularly vulnerable to the threats of shipping accidents and oil spills.
- Establishing sectoral best practices specifically for sensitive marine areas.*
- Establishing area-based cetacean, turtle or other marine species sanctuaries (recognising that WWF hopes to elevate the status of these zones from one-species to multi-species and multi-habitat protection).
- Implementation of strategies to assist ecosystems in protected and sensitive areas to adapt to climate change.

* This does not include industry standards for the sector as a whole or for purposes other than as it relates to sensitive marine areas. For example, pursuing the adoption of measures to protect identified important reefs from land-based sources of pollution is considered a contribution to this milestone. Pursuing the adoption of new national standards for land-based sources of pollution is not.



© WWF-Canon / WWF-Norway/Frode JOHANSEN

Protecting Sensitive Environments from Oil & Gas Exploitation

The Lofoten Islands in northern Norway were designated as a petroleum-free zone by the Norwegian government in December 2003, after successful campaigning by WWF Norway and the WWF Arctic Programme. The decision was a huge setback for the oil industry which had claimed that it could exist in harmony with valuable and vulnerable environments. Norsk Hydro and Statoil had been pressuring the Norwegian government to open up the region to exploration, claiming that it held oil and gas reserves worth an estimated 100 billion Euros. The Norwegian government countered, with the support of WWF, saying that the industry had failed to demonstrate that it could operate without risk to the environment.

With protection granted until 2006, WWF is working to secure permanent protection for this valuable and diverse region, which is home to the world's largest known cold-water coral reef and includes the spawning ground for the world's largest remaining cod population and several whale populations.

No-Take Zones - Safe Havens for Fish

Increasingly, scientists, governments and most importantly, the fishing industry, are coming to realize the benefits of fully-protected marine reserves and no-take zones as a means to secure the long-term sustainability of fisheries and to provide insurance against fishery collapse. WWF has been a vocal advocate for the use of no-take zones, working with industry and governments to establish these zones all over the world. Some recent highlights include:

- **Australia's** landmark decisions to increase the no-take zone in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park to 33% of the park's total area, representing an additional 160,000 sq km of ocean.
- The EU agreed to give permanent protection to the unique cold-water coral reefs at the **Darwin Mounds**, off Scotland, after three and a half years of WWF campaigning for a ban on deep-water bottom trawling in the area.
- In the **Mediterranean**, WWF has worked with the fishing industry to establish No-Take Zones in Greece, Italy and Turkey, to protect key fish species and habitats for the endangered monk seal.
- The US has designated its largest no-take zone in the Florida **Tortugas** region and is also showing recovery of commercial fish stocks in **Georges Bank**, off Maine, as a result of closures for bottom fishing.
- **Belize** protected 13 critical spawning sites for the Nassau Grouper as no-take zones, and implemented an annual closed season to further protect the species.

PSSAs – Protection from Shipping Damage

Shipping can cause a lot of damage to marine ecosystems. Oil spills in particular can be disastrous – wiping out sea life over large areas – but smaller impacts, such as ship groundings, anchor damage and the dumping of rubbish and oily waste can also harm sensitive habitats.

Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) designation through the International Maritime Organization (IMO) allows special controls to be placed on ships so that, for example, they have to avoid certain areas or ban discharge of waste. For example, the Great Barrier Reef PSSA requires ships transiting through difficult coral reef passages to use local pilots.

PSSA designation can be a useful management tool to protect nationally important areas that are vulnerable to shipping impacts. To date, there are PSSAs in Australia, Cuba, Colombia, Florida, the Wadden Sea, the Canary Islands, the Galapagos, the European Western Waters, the Baltic Sea and the Torres Straits.

WWF is actively promoting this tool in the IMO, with the sensitive Barents Sea as one of the areas needing urgent protection from shipping disasters.

Baltic Sea Campaign Success



© WWF-Canon / Mauri RAUTKARI

In April 2004, the IMO classified the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. The Baltic Sea is the world's largest brackish water sea and home to many seabirds, several seal species and the harbour porpoise, all sensitive to oil spills and pollution. The very character of this isolated sea, with little exchange of water with the adjacent North Sea, makes it even more vulnerable to environmental disturbances.

WWF campaigned for the designation of the Baltic Sea for several years and welcomed the IMO's decision. WWF now encourages the Baltic Sea states to develop and propose effective measures to strengthen the safety of shipping in these areas, such as establishing strictly separated shipping traffic lanes and setting up compulsory pilotage systems.

WWF also calls on the Russian Federation, the only country opposing the designation, to add its waters to the Baltic Sea PSSA.

Contacts

Sian PULLEN, WWF International
+44 1483 412519, spullen@wwf.org.uk

Sarah BLADEN, WWF International
+41 22 364 9019, sbladen@wwfint.org