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 Fisheries

# Proposed 'Marine Prosperity Areas' framework would link ocean conservation with economic growth

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## New ocean conservation model aims to protect marine ecosystems while boosting local economies, proving that nature and human prosperity can co-exist

For decades, marine conservation has often meant tough trade-offs – sacrificing economic opportunities today for the promise of a healthier ocean tomorrow. But **a new framework** (<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/marine-science/articles/10.3389/fmars.2024.1491483/abstract>) proposed by an international team of scientists and economists is flipping the script. Using so-called “Marine Prosperity Areas,” this approach aims to align marine restoration with human prosperity, using strategic investments and community partnerships to ensure that both people and the planet thrive.

Marine Prosperity Areas (MPpAs) mark a more holistic approach to marine conservation, with a framework that seeks to use targeted financial investments to enhance human prosperity during periods of active ecological restoration. To fully realize the vision for Marine Prosperity Areas, the researchers are calling on governments, non-governmental organizations and local stakeholders to



Proposed ocean conservation model protects marine ecosystems while boosting local economies, proving nature and human prosperity can coexist. Photo by [Gilberto Olimpio](https://www.pexels.com/photo/school-of-fish-near-corals-under-water-7865055/) (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/school-of-fish-near-corals-under-water-7865055/>).

champion MPpAs as a cornerstone of global conservation efforts, committing to the investments and partnerships necessary to build a sustainable future.

“Conservation often demands sacrifices today for benefits decades in the future – an unrealistic expectation for communities facing immediate socio-economic pressures,” said Aburto, lead author of the study and professor of marine biology at Scripps Oceanography. “Our model for Marine Prosperity Areas addresses this challenge, outlining how human prosperity can be improved while we wait for ecological recovery. By strategically aligning recovery efforts, it is possible for both people and ecosystems to thrive.”

Building on decades of research in Mexico’s Baja California Peninsula and the Gulf of California, Marine Prosperity Areas offer a unique approach to ocean conservation. Unlike past efforts, which lacked a unified strategy, this model combines financial investment with community partnerships to balance ecological restoration with economic growth. In practice, this could mean funding ecotourism ventures like snorkeling tours, supporting sustainable aquaculture or investing in artificial reefs to restore marine habitats. The goal is to create opportunities for local communities to thrive while protecting the ocean.

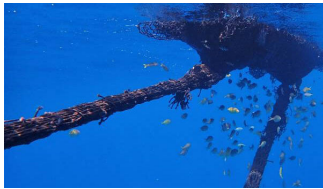


(<https://link.chtbl.com/aquapod>).

If implemented, Marine Prosperity Areas have the power to be a leading tool for achieving global conservation targets, said the authors. This includes the “30 by 30” target set by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, an international commitment to protect 30 percent of the world’s oceans by 2030.

“The concept of Marine Prosperity Areas can help us to bridge the gap between environmental and social outcomes,” said Alfredo Giron, study co-author and a Scripps Oceanography alumnus now serving as head of the World Economic Forum’s Ocean Action Agenda and Friends of Ocean Action. “It gives us the opportunity to understand that nature and people are inextricably linked and as such, a marine management plan has to pursue outcomes for both.”

## Can repurposing fish aggregating devices make MPAs more effective?



A new study suggests that fish aggregating devices could be repurposed to enhance marine protected areas (MPAs).



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Under the proposed framework, Marine Prosperity Areas follow a three-phase approach to ensure lasting success. First, communities and stakeholders collaborate to define prosperity and create sustainable strategies for using marine resources. Next, investments focus on building governance, infrastructure and enforcement systems to support the initiative. Finally, ongoing monitoring and management help refine the approach, using scientific data to balance conservation with economic growth.

“This concept offers a roadmap for inclusive and impactful conservation, where both communities and nature can thrive, provided that investment and proactive participation are prioritized,” said Catalina Lopez, study co-author and director of the Gulf of California Marine Program, Institute of the Americas.

The framework draws inspiration from successful marine conservation efforts like Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park in Mexico, where a once-depleted marine reserve rebounded through collaboration between scientists, the government and local fishermen. Similar successes in La Paz and Santa Maria Bay highlight the power of community involvement and sustainable funding, reinforcing the need for financial support and local engagement in marine protection efforts.

Not all marine conservation efforts have succeeded, often due to financial hardships that made it difficult for communities to wait for ecosystem recovery. The new framework addresses this by proactively funding local economies alongside restoration efforts, ensuring broader support. It also considers the needs of diverse stakeholders, from fishing and tourism industries to Indigenous and underserved communities.

“One of the greatest challenges in its successful implementation will be ensuring sustained support for this vision throughout all stages,” said Valentina Platzgummer, study co-author and coordinator of the Conservation Leadership Program and researcher at the Centro para la Biodiversidad Marina y la Conservación, A.C. “It will be crucial to maintain a long-term commitment from all stakeholders, both in terms of funds and support, to navigate the complexities and ensure the framework’s goals are achieved.”

With strong support from individuals and organizations, the researchers claim that Marine Prosperity Areas offer “a hopeful vision” where healthy oceans and thriving communities co-exist. The framework is also highly adaptable, said the authors, making it well-suited for global implementation.

“This vision is not only achievable but essential for our collective well-being in the face of growing environmental and social challenges,” they wrote.

**[Read the full study here \(https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/marine-science/articles/10.3389/fmars.2024.1491483/full\)](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/marine-science/articles/10.3389/fmars.2024.1491483/full)**.

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