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Some Marine Protected Areas Are Just 'Paper Parks', Says Study

on April 11, 2023 in [News](#)

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Some marine protected areas are only "parks on paper", denounces a study

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Even though it is over 60% of the oceans and near half of the planet, the high seas have long been ignored in the environmental fight.

A new study from the University of British Columbia reveals a discrepancy between the legal status of some marine protected areas (MPAs) around the world and the level of fishing that would occur. Its authors call on international institutions for more surveillance in these designated areas, which would be little protected in practice.



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Classifying 30% of the oceans under protected status by 2030: the objective that the international community set itself in December in Montreal is a major one. But what is the point of reaching these targets if these areas are only preserved on paper? The results of a study in the journal *Marine Policy* have marine biodiversity experts concerned.

In 49 of the 184 assessed MPAs, classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the level of fishing perceived by stakeholders in these regions is such that it contravenes their conservation status. These are parks on paper, denounces Daniel Pauly, professor specializing in fisheries resources and fisheries at the University of British Columbia and co-author of the study.

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Even territories where logging is prohibited, defined as *no-take zones*, are concerned, is surprised Mathieu Cusson, professor at the University of Quebec in Chicoutimi, specialist in marine and coastal environments. Nearly 75% of respondents reported light, moderate or heavy fishing in these areas.

I thought there would be a perception that it was protected. We give the tools to precisely protect these areas as much as possible and that does not seem to be the case, says Mathieu Cusson.

For Mathieu Cusson, marine protected areas should not be set up if governments do not have the tools to monitor compliance with these regulations.

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“It lifts the veil on the fact [that we have to] be careful, instead of protecting places at all costs, if only to say that we reach [international] goals. »

— Mathieu Cusson, specialist in marine and coastal environments, University of Quebec at

f utimi



JCN defines six categories of MPAs in the world. Determining whether they are in fact protected is a difficult task, given their large number and the variability of the levels of protection

authorizing or not authorizing certain forms of exploitation, explains Mathieu Cusson.



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To estimate their real protection, the UBC researchers interviewed stakeholders familiar with these environments, in a process that was elegantly simple, according to the UQAC researcher. They were based mainly on the perceptions of local stakeholders: academics, fishermen, journalists, civil servants and non-governmental organizations, contacted by email.

The latter were invited to answer a single question on their perception of fishing in a targeted MPA in their country. For this, four answer choices were offered: no fishing, a little fishing, a moderate fishing, a very intense fishing. A total of 1107 responses were used.

Daniel Pauly has already denounced the lack of protection of marine protected areas at the IMPAC5 international conference held in Vancouver in February.

The researchers then defined a protection index for these MPAs, based on the difference between the perception of fishing in these areas and the protection that their designation implies. The higher the difference, the more it means that these areas are not doing their job, explains Daniel Pauly.

And result: across the world, the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are the regions where there seem to be the most parks on paper. However, none have been identified in the Arctic and in the North American and Greenland regions.



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Daniel Pauly, his results call into question the practices of certain governments. The study only into account fishing as a means of pressure on these protected areas, because it is the most important factor of reduction of the biomass in these areas, according to him.

Europe, bottom trawling in marine protected areas is still allowed, although the European Commission has pledged to change this by 2030.

For Daniel Pauly, France is one of the governments that do not effectively preserve their marine protected areas.

“Design places without human predation. The ocean is huge. Can we leave a little of the ocean to the fish? Do we really need to be everywhere?”

—Daniel Pauly, study co-author, professor at the University of British Columbia

According to a report on the state of world fisheries and aquaculture by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the percentage of overexploited fish stocks in the world keeps increasing. In 2019, this was the case for 35.4% of stocks, while 57.3% are exploited in a maximum sustainable manner.

Although the results of the study highlight disparities between the regions of the world, they do not allow conclusions to be drawn on the management of MPAs by country, underlines Daniel Pauly. At least one MPA was studied per coastal nation, which is not representative of their overall management of these territories.


Fish on the coral reef of Hol Chan Marine Reserve, on the outskirts of San Pedro village, in Ambergris Cay, Belize.

These results could, however, serve as a starting point for other more local research, even if the mission of protecting the oceans goes beyond borders, according to Daniel Pauly.

Following the evolution of these protection indices would also be interesting, both on a large scale and at the local level, confirms Mathieu Couson. If we target certain places with this article, maybe that will change things, he says.

In the meantime, this study will make it possible to ring the doorbell of alarm with the authorities, according to him.

“This may teach a lesson to those who want to reach the 2030 goals at all costs. I think it would be interesting to reach them, but not just on paper. »

 Mathieu Cusson, marine and coastal environment expert, University of Quebec at Chicoutimi



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TEILOR STONE 

Teilor Stone has been a reporter on the news desk since 2013. Before that she wrote about young adolescence and family dynamics for Styles and was the legal affairs correspondent for the Metro desk. Before joining TheSaxon , Teilor Stone worked as a staff writer at the Village Voice and a freelancer for Newsday, The Wall Street Journal, GQ and Mirabella. To get in touch, contact me through my teilor@nizhtimes.com 1-800-268-7116

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