

## *Protecting the World's ocean – The Promise of Sydney*

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### INTRODUCTION

Captured from the boldest thinking of governments, international organizations, communities, civil society leaders and indigenous peoples, the four pillars of the Promise of Sydney collectively represent the outcomes of the 2014 World Parks Congress. These pillars – a core vision for the future, a set of innovative approaches to solving some of the world's most elusive challenges, a series of commitments for people, protected areas and the planet, and existing solutions that provide evidence that these innovative approaches are in fact within reach – collectively represent a blueprint for change. Originally proposed by a youth leader in the preparations for Congress, the Promise of Sydney is a deliberate step away from the usual declaration and action plan typical of international events. Instead, it represents the promise to our children and a belief in a promising future for all. This paper sets out the context for the marine aspects of the Promise of Sydney, how it was developed, what it contains, and the roadmap moving forwards.

### From Durban to Sydney

Since its first staging in 1962 in Seattle, USA, the World Parks Congress has substantially influenced the way in which the world has viewed protected areas. The series of congresses has influenced and tracked perspectives on the role of protected areas in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Each of the six congresses made vital contributions to conservation policy worldwide by addressing global challenges and opportunities, establishing standards to ensure that protected areas are effective, and providing a source of inspiration and innovation for the next decade ahead.

In 2003, the fifth IUCN World Parks Congress was held in Durban, South Africa. This Congress marked a paradigm shift on two fronts: first, the perception of parks evolved from 'islands of conservation' to global instruments of biodiversity conservation providing economic and social benefits 'beyond boundaries'. Second, the Durban Congress was the first to provide significant attention to non-terrestrial parks, and provided a significant opportunity to move the marine conservation

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agenda forward. While only two of the 33 recommendations focused on marine protected areas (MPAs), they were major milestones in re-setting the overall direction and levels of ambition needed for protecting the ocean (Laffoley *et al.*, 2008).

The first marine recommendation focused on Building a Global System of Marine and Coastal Protected Area Networks. It reiterated calls on the international community to establish a global system of representative networks of marine and coastal protected areas, but included the need to establish strictly protected areas to cover 20–30% of each major habitat by 2012. Furthermore, an ecosystem-based approach to sustainable fisheries management and marine biodiversity conservation was also recommended. The second recommendation focused on the High Seas – those areas of ocean that fall beyond the jurisdiction of any individual country and cover half the Earth's surface. This recommendation called for action to promote a range of activities to secure MPAs on the High Seas.

These two marine recommendations, along with the other 31, were 'packaged' into the Durban Accord and Action Plan – a groundbreaking move that allowed greater international visibility and easier post-referencing to the outcome document of the fifth World Parks Congress. It was a natural development for the sixth World Parks Congress, held in Sydney, Australia in November 2014, to strengthen these elements through the 'Promise of Sydney'.

### Congress context

The sixth World Parks Congress represented the largest gathering of protected area professionals to date. More than 6000 people from 170 countries attended. Marine was a central and vibrant 'Cross-Cutting Theme' of the Congress. Congress delegates had the opportunity to explore marine and coastal topics in a variety of formats. These included 220 programme sessions and a networking and informational hub for those interested in marine issues at the main exhibit hall's Ocean Pavilion. This reach extended beyond in-person Congress participants via five virtual sessions hosted as 'Google Hangouts.'

This plethora of activities generated important material for the Promise of Sydney. As described by IUCN, the Promise includes four components, being:

1. a broad vision of the future we want to see;
2. a set of Innovative Solutions generated by each Congress Stream and Cross-Cutting Theme that make recommendations for key actions needed;
3. solutions that describe examples of where these innovative ideas have been successfully applied; and
4. commitments from governments and organizations regarding specific actions they will take to work toward this common vision.

Congress organizers intended the Promise of Sydney to be the rallying point around which organizations and individuals could assess their own strategic direction in relation to protected areas, and around which they develop their individual 'Promise.' They hoped that in years to come, the protected areas community would look back on the Promise of Sydney as setting a new direction towards effective and efficient solutions to some of the world's most challenging development issues.

In this paper, the 'Marine Promise' refers to the innovative solutions document – a component of the Promise of Sydney [<http://worldparkscongress.org/downloads/approaches/ThemeM.pdf>] that includes recommendations from the marine community on critical actions that must be taken to protect our ocean, its resources, and the people who depend upon it for the decade to come.

### THREATENED OCEAN; THREATENED COMMUNITIES

The threats to the ocean underlined at the 2003 World Parks Congress have increased in the past decade. The world's population continues to increase, and the majority of humans live in close proximity to coasts, placing increasing demands on the ocean for economic prosperity and well-being. Among the biggest threats to the ocean are the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification; unsustainable fishing; fragmentation and loss of habitat; land-based pollution; unsustainable coastal development; oil, gas and

mineral extraction; shipping impacts; alien species introductions; and marine debris. New threats such as deep-sea mining and unsustainable aquaculture are looming. The effects of all the above threats are cumulative and are likely to be synergistic. We are just now realizing the extent and severity of pressures, the scale of change affecting the ocean and its ramifications for our health and well-being. These pressures particularly impact small-scale fishing communities, indigenous peoples, and local coastal communities, all of whom rely on coastal ecosystems for food security and disaster risk reduction among other ecosystem services. Moreover, many existing MPAs lack sufficient resources and legal authority for effective protection (World Parks Congress, 2014).

These and many other concerns were addressed through sessions at the World Parks Congress. Specific examples of concerns raised included the impacts of climate change on marine and coastal regions, including the poles; the impacts of port and coastal development, or new threats such as deep-sea mining, on MPAs around the world; the need for equitable approaches to MPA governance that address human rights and social needs; the need to understand and communicate MPAs as tools for meeting human needs; and the need to accelerate conservation actions to address growing impacts.

### **PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE MARINE PROMISE**

The Marine Promise was developed through an open process with major marine players in the world, including Non-Governmental Organizations and active members of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas devoted to Marine issues (WCPA-Marine). In June 2014, the team in charge of developing the programme for the Marine Cross-Cutting Theme (the team) at the Congress hosted a meeting through IUCN's Global Marine Community in Washington DC to reach out to partners in the marine community, requesting input on the types of recommendations that should be included in the Marine Promise. Following up on this meeting, the team solicited

ideas and specific language for marine recommendations in the Promise via email during September 2014. This feedback was consolidated and refined into a draft Marine Promise that was made public via the World Parks Congress website several weeks in advance of the Congress.

During the Congress, rapporteurs attended all major sessions to take notes and identify major themes and issues arising from presentations and discussions. These were collected at the end of each day and shared with representatives of each Stream and Cross-Cutting Theme. The team discussed the issues and ideas both internally and with the individual Congress participants who raised them during informal discussions throughout the Congress. This process allowed for the creation of a near final draft prior to the last day of the Congress, as requested by IUCN, so that major concepts could be presented at the closing sub-plenary on 18 November 2014. Audience members attending the sub-plenary were given an opportunity to comment on the near-final recommendations presented by each Stream and Cross-Cutting Theme.

This dialogue with Congress participants continued in the weeks following the Congress via email in order to work out a few key issues within the recommendations.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MARINE PROMISE**

The final Marine Promise recommendations can be grouped in three broad areas:

1. MPA targets and effectiveness;
2. international agreements; and
3. engaging with people.

The first group includes recommendations to increase the ocean area included in MPAs, commit to management effectiveness, and integrate MPAs within the broader seascape. The first recommendation was the most controversial and is further discussed below. The second group includes recommendations to more effectively integrate marine conservation objectives into existing or planned international agreements on

climate change, the high seas, sustainable development goals and illegal fishing. The third group recognizes the pivotal role of people in the long-term success of conservation actions, and recommends that MPAs be managed for human as well as ecological benefits. It also recommends the strengthening of public support for marine conservation, and the expansion of innovative partnerships with businesses and other non-traditional partners to bring new skills and resources into the collective marine conservation enterprise.

## DISCUSSION

The most controversial recommendation in the Marine Promise was Recommendation 1, which reads as follows: ‘Urgently increase the ocean area that is effectively and equitably managed in ecologically representative and well-connected systems of MPAs or other effective conservation measures. This network should target protection of both biodiversity and ecosystem services and should include at least 30% of each marine habitat. The ultimate aim is to create a fully sustainable ocean, at least 30% of which has no extractive activities.’

The goal of 30% no-take coverage is considerably more ambitious than the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Aichi Target 11, which was set in 2010. Aichi Target 11 calls for 10% of marine areas to be conserved in MPAs or other effective area-based conservation measures by 2020. Under that target, the MPAs don’t need to be no-take (MPA News, 2010).

However, current no-take coverage still amounts to less than 1% of the world’s ocean. The Marine Promise reinforces the goal set in the Durban Accord for 20–30% of the world’s ocean to be placed in no-take areas. The 30% no-take figure also falls between the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Aichi Target 11 and the ‘Nature Needs Half’ campaign led by several conservation NGOs (MPA News, 2014).

The Marine Promise also takes note that the ultimate aim is to create a fully sustainable ocean. It is not enough to call for MPAs amid

unmanaged ocean space. In his presentation of the Marine Promise at the sixth World Parks Congress, Dan Laffoley, marine vice-chair for the World Commission on Protected Areas, underlined the danger of ‘creating islands of hope in a sea of despair’. This reflects the recognition that, to be effective, MPAs need to be approached as a spatially-explicit tool which complements overarching means for strong protection that apply throughout the ocean – whether or not the area falls within countries’ jurisdictions (MPA News, 2014)

The dialogue concerning the 30% goal continued via email exchanges between a few Congress participants and the team following the Congress. Many diverse perspectives were expressed on the wording of the spatial target for MPAs, with some commenting that the 30% no-take MPA goal was unrealistic, while others felt it did not go far enough. The drafting team developed the final language of the recommendations, keeping in mind the following considerations:

- recommendations should represent an aspirational goal – a major ‘stretch’ from the current state of play. This is in line with how World Parks Congress recommendations have been historically developed, laying out a vision of what is ultimately needed for a healthy planet;
- recommendations should not set goals that are less ambitious than they were a decade ago, i.e. in the Durban Accord;
- the recommendations themselves are just the first step in a process that will require collaboration across the marine community to adapt and scale up ‘inspiring solutions’ to make progress toward our global marine conservation goals.

## NEXT STEPS

The Marine Promise is an expression of the collective aspirations of the majority of Congress participants, based on an unprecedented gathering of experts from across the globe. Unlike resolutions adopted at the World Conservation Congress (WCC), held every four years, the Marine Promise is not a formally adopted resolution, but specific elements may be enshrined in resolutions via subsequent World Conservation

Congresses. It is also distinct from the formal commitments under existing treaties like the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Targets that commit participating governments to specific goals. However, the less formal nature of the Marine Promise also presents an opportunity for dialogue and debate, as well as more ambitious language driven by conservation needs rather than political realities. This Promise can then serve as a common reference point for the motions and commitments that will follow with the WCC in 2016, and the end of the Aichi Targets in 2020.

Key milestones to advance the Marine Promise include:

- 'Little Sydney' meetings held regionally to follow up on WPC (e.g. Europe in May 2015);
- 'Our Oceans' Conference in Chile in October 2015;
- World Conservation Congress in Hawaii in September 2016;
- IUCN's 2017–2020 Programme (to be adopted at the WCC); and
- Fourth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC4) in Chile in 2017.

These meetings provide key opportunities to advance the common agenda outlined in Sydney while maintaining the momentum within the protected areas community and its partners to protect the world's ocean treasures.

## CONCLUSION

The noticeable differences between Durban and Sydney include the process followed to develop the outcome document, as well as the number of players involved in the development of its marine component. These differences positively reflect the significant progress on the marine conservation agenda over the past decade. Durban 'kick started' the process of including marine-specific, sometimes

binding goals and targets in international documents. Governments and international donors, as a result, devoted more resources towards marine protection measures and committed to protect ever-larger areas of their Exclusive Economic Zones. An increased number of professionals gained experience and expertise in marine resources management, and MPA networks were formed or consolidated to share best practices and lessons learnt.

The fact that the Marine Promise generated such interest and heated debate – particularly Recommendation 1 (which can be seen as the overarching recommendation) – is a positive demonstration of the evolution in our collective thinking and perception of our ocean. It has long ceased to be seen as 'boundless expanse' (Flaubert, 1992) providing infinite supplies. We now understand that the finite resources the sea provides are being increasingly depleted as the world's population rises and our technologies advance. We understand the urgency for bold collective action to protect these resources for the sake of our own survival. The Marine Promise provides direction on how we can achieve this.

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