

The Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) advises the U.S. Secretary of Commerce on marine resources policy and programs that affect our nation's marine fish and mammal populations. MAFAC adopted the following position paper in March 1999.

Report of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee on Marine Reserves

There exists sufficient and credible evidence that marine reserves (a.k.a. marine protected areas, marine management areas, marine fishery reserves) are a viable component of fishery management. This evidence plus a perception in some cases that no other known alternative is available, contributes to the fact that marine fishery reserves are and will continue to be a significant issue in marine fishery management.

So far as MAFAC members are aware, there exist no coherent guidelines within the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that relate to marine fishery reserve creation and management. NMFS involvement in marine fishery reserve programs, as a result, is widely variable and for the most part reactive in nature. In general, the overall approach of NMFS and many other groups has been to establish scientific criteria, facilitate enforcement, and attempt to resolve gear conflicts and other fishery issues as they relate to marine fishery reserves. In its examination of the issue, MAFAC perceived a substantial disconnect between scientists, managers, and stakeholders in the processes of creating and enforcing marine fishery reserves. MAFAC recommends that NMFS take a more pro-active approach to marine fishery reserves.

The NMFS approach should include as its centerpiece stakeholder education and assistance with marine fishery reserve design and management. Stakeholders should include all fishers (recreational, commercial, artisanal), other related federal agencies such as the National Ocean Service's (NOS) Marine Sanctuaries Program, regulators, scientists, and the general public. We present the following recommendations to NMFS:

1. NMFS should acknowledge marine reserves as a major issue and management tool. In doing so, NMFS should examine its allocation of staff who are facilitating marine fishery reserve discussion and outreach. Because staffing is likely to be a problem, we suggest NMFS fully investigate and utilize alternative sources of expertise including but not limited to:
 - Interagency collaborations (councils, commissions, states, etc.);
 - Internships (universities);
 - Volunteers (general public); and
 - Consultant contracts.
2. NMFS should collaborate with other groups to develop commonly accepted definitions of the terms "reserve," "refuge," "sanctuary," "closed area," "protected zone," etc.

3. NMFS should synthesize information and make it available for use by councils/commissions/territories/states/local groups to facilitate their discussion of marine fishery reserves. In particular the information should include:
 - Definitions of terms; and
 - Synthesis of data, results, and effects of marine fishery reserves for the purposes of stakeholder education and collaboration prior to creation of marine fishery reserve regulations.

4. NMFS should further work with the groups listed above to:
 - Identify the current overall extent of no fishing areas (military, disposal, no take, etc.) as a baseline for coordinating and evaluating the need for marine fishery reserves, and in particular, for each major coastal region synthesize information on existing closures, regulations, and other management practices that serve as the basis for de facto reserves;
 - Facilitate processes that are pro-active and characterized by a bottom-up approach and that involve input from stakeholders at all levels;
 - Develop features that are customizable by region and that allow for dynamic problem solving;
 - Develop inter- (& intra-) agency collaborations that address issues related to marine fishery reserves such as non-point source pollution (U.S. Department of Agriculture), sedimentation (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), community ecology concerns (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), communication cable siting (FCC), fishing by users from other territories (territorial governments, fishing associations), dredge spoils (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), other broad issues of regulation and enforcement (NOS marine sanctuaries, wildlife refuges, national parks), etc.;
 - Collect and disseminate information relating to performance of marine fishery reserves, including both scientific evidence and testimonials of large and small scale fishers (domestic and global);
 - Characterize essential selection criteria (biological, economic and sociological);
 - Focus on intact ecosystems;
 - Develop information on the complexity of non-fishing factors that also affect fish habitat and include examination of activities that would affect biodiversity within marine fishery reserves;
 - List expected outcomes that can be quantified in terms of both positive and negative socioeconomic and environmental results; and
 - Outline conditions that define when a marine fishery reserve might be terminated after having completed the job for which it was established.

NMFS should take full advantage of the five-year Sanctuary Review and the National Marine Sanctuary Act Reauthorization that currently are underway. In particular, NMFS should look for disjunctions between federal and state/territorial management relations.

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