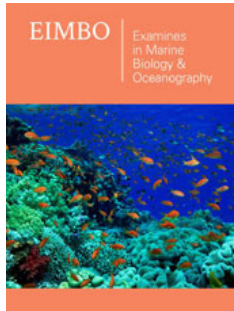


Marine Protected Areas as Paper Parks in Italian Seawaters

ISSN: 2578-031X



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Opinion

Marine Protected Areas (hereafter MPAs) could be the main cornerstones in the protection of Italian coastal waters. Really, Italy holds a rich marine biodiversity confirmed by the presence of 32 MPAs for a global surface area of 228.000 hectares, as the 4.53% of Italian territorial seawaters (Figure 1).



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Submission: 📅 August 21, 2023

Published: 📅 August 24, 2023

Volume 6 - Issue 2

How to cite this article: Nicola Cantasano*. Marine Protected Areas as Paper Parks in Italian Seawaters. Examines Mar Biol Oceanogr. 6(2). EIMBO. 000634. 2023. DOI: [10.31031/EIMBO.2023.06.000634](https://doi.org/10.31031/EIMBO.2023.06.000634)

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Figure 1: Geographic map of MPAs in Italian coastal seawaters (drawn from internet at: <https://www.marevivo.it/attivita/aree-marine-protette>).

These numerical data seem quite good but, really, they are very far from the threshold level of 30% recommended by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), that should be protected in European coastal waters by 2030 [1]. In Italian seaboard areas, MPAs are until now simple paper parks without any running operations and, very often, lacking in management plans, as stated by the World Wildlife Fund [2]. Actually, it is very difficult to solve this critical issue because MPAs form a complex socio-ecological system that needs a multiple and holistic approach, hard to apply in a country characterized by a high fragmentation between local, regional and national authorities. Moreover, there are many problems concerning the establishment and the effectiveness of MPAs such as: incorrect territorial planning, lacking governance, absence of controls, inadequate financial support and conflicts amongst potential stakeholders [3]. Above all, the ineffectiveness of MPAs is due to a little and short involvement of local people in their management, that instead should be

the base of a bottom-up process [4]. In fact, it is necessary to have a strong support from the public opinion in the design and in the implementation of MPAs [5] because human dimension plays an important role for their complete and successful outcome [6]. In this way, it is timely to promote an effective human engagement in the management of MPAs locating them in coastal areas characterized by high population density and enclosed with land-based parks, associated to human amenities [7]. In fact, ensuring an effective protection both in land and sea environments could improve the functional role of MPAs preventing marine pollution, sedimentation and/or eutrophication processes [8].

In the long run, the presence of MPAs could also increase the fishery productivity through spillover effects just outside the protected areas [9,10]. Finally, MPAs could enhance other benefits such as: Cultural activities, recreation, tourism, education and scientific research [11-16]. In conclusion, an effective human engagement in the establishment and in the implementation of MPAs could become the key-word to coordinate public and private efforts in a sound coastal management.

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