



Highlights of the Third World Heritage Marine Managers Conference (27-31 August 2016, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador)

Last month, UNESCO's World Heritage Marine Programme hosted a gathering of the guardians of the 49 wonders of the world's oceans. Since the first marine site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1982, the network has grown to encompass 49 sites in 37 countries that stretch from the tropics to the poles. It includes the breeding grounds of the world's last healthy population of grey whales, the highest density of ancestral polar-bear dens, and home of the world's most ancient fish and the inimitable marine iguana.

One of the core tasks of the World Heritage Marine Programme is to support collaboration across this global network, sharing learning and scaling up successes. At the recent conference in the Galapagos, managers exchanged ideas, worked with top experts in ocean conservation and climate adaptation, and formed relationships that will allow them to leverage an unparalleled brain trust of scientists, practitioners and thought leaders as we move forward to protect this ocean legacy of humanity:

Conference highlights:

- An introduction to the many faces of climate change with one of the world's leading climate scientists, Dr. Martin Visbeck. Visbeck explained that climate projections are always given as global averages, but local impacts vary considerably from place to place. Some areas are seeing drought, some flooding, and while some regions are seeing three times the global average for sea level rise, others are seeing none. Visbeck showed how World Heritage sites could become global reference points for measuring climate effects in the ocean over time.
- A workshop led by Lara Hansen and Paul Marshall helped managers measure and plan for climate risks. Managers identified key indicators—ranging from coral cover and whale shark numbers at Ningaloo Reef to waterfall and river flows at the West Norwegian Fjords—that will help them track change over time, inform climate action plans, and evaluate their effectiveness.
- A glimpse into the future of fisheries with top scientist Dr. Daniel Pauly. Pauly explained that World Heritage sites -- like other ocean places -- struggle with shifting baselines, meaning that every generation uses a new benchmark to measure ocean health, losing sight of the ongoing decline in fish stocks and biodiversity across the ocean and its special places.
- Dr. Stephen Box of Smithsonian Institute built on the views of Dr. Pauly by showing that fish catch in marine World Heritage sites is likely substantially underestimated because we don't track sport, recreational and artisanal fisheries closely. These fisheries are often considered small, he said, but they are legion, and could mean that 1.5 times more fish is being taken from the ocean than officially estimated. That could considerably alter the calculations of how much fish is actually taken out of these treasured World Heritage places.
- Pauly and Box shared tools marine World Heritage managers can use to start calculating the real amount of fish taken out of their sites each year, from an Android phone app to a new global atlas.

- Enric Sala concluded that World Heritage marine sites should function like “time capsules,” showing us what a healthy ocean looks like without unsustainable human interference. He emphasized the importance of no-take zones, and highlighted examples like [Scandola Reserve](#), where they have 31-year-old fish inside the no-take zone that produce 200 times more babies than the 5-year-old fish that are caught outside its boundaries.
- Brian Sullivan of Google Ocean & Earth Outreach gave managers an exclusive tour of [Global Fishing Watch](#) before its public launch. He explained how this “eye in the sky” can help them track illegal fishing and transshipping, and showed how the tool has made it possible for the small island nation of Kiribati to effectively enforce the industrial fishing ban in the [Phoenix Islands Protected Area](#), the largest site on the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- Scott Gende of [Glacier Bay](#) explained how a new market-driven system for cruise ship tourism has reduced air and water pollution to nearly zero while bringing financial resources to the site for long-term monitoring and research. He planted the seed for a global alliance that would establish a similar win-win system in all marine World Heritage sites with similar levels of cruise ship tourism.
- Our host for the week, Sven Lindblad, emphasized the power of the World Heritage brand to help sites secure sustainable and long-term financing, and explained why every travel business operating in World Heritage marine sites should invest in their conservation, since nature is the asset in which they trade.
- Zack Abraham, WWF’s global campaign manager, echoed this point, underscoring the potential for these sites to leverage their iconic status to attract financing and public and political support for sustainable conservation of these places.
- Communications training from Nancy Baron of COMPASS and Pulitzer Prize Winning journalist, Kenneth Weiss, empowered managers to make the case for conservation, and equipped each to tell the story of their site. Here are a few sound bites:
 - “iSimangaliso means miracle: whales, lions, and rhinos living alongside new species discovered every year. It is the restitution of nature but also of people.” – [iSimangaliso Wetlands Park](#)
 - “It is heaven on earth. So beautiful, you cannot believe it. Home to hundreds of plants and animals found nowhere else.” – [Socotra Archipelago](#)
 - “Papahānaumokuākea serves as a reminder of the connection between people and nature, through a series of altars that celebrate the boundary between life and the after life. It is home to 100 million birds including Wisdom, a 70 year old albatross that is still laying eggs.” -- [Papahānaumokuākea](#)
 - “This place contains the seven wonders of nature, including an 8,2 km underwater river, and the second largest navigable river in the world” – [Palau’s Rock Islands Southern Lagoon](#)
 - “A living system so vast that it sparkles from space.” – [Great Barrier Reef](#)

Outcomes:

- Following the announcement that 33% of [Galapagos Marine Park](#) has been set aside as a no-take zones, managers from the Great Barrier Reef in Australia (which closed a similar percentage of its waters to fishing in 2004) and Galapagos National Park pledged a closer collaboration to scale up compliance and monitoring in their respective no-take zones.
- Managers from [Galapagos Islands](#), [Coiba National Park](#), [Cocos Island National Park](#), [Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary](#), [Area de Conservación Guanacaste](#), [Archipiélago de Revillagigedo](#), and [Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California](#) signed a historic agreement, the “Carta de Punta Suarez” to signify their commitment to working together to reduce illegal and unregulated fisheries in their sites.

- The ideas and partnerships emerging from this meeting will inform the work of the marine World Heritage network over the next three years, setting the foundation for a more sustainable future for these crown jewels of the ocean.

Conference film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmID3ppSQbE>

Conference photos: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/collections/24/>



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