

Chagos Archipelago becomes a no fishing zone

November 1 2010



Credit: CEN

Commercial fishing around the Chagos Archipelago has ended, making it the largest no-take marine protected area (MPA) in the world.

The remaining fishing licenses expired at midnight 31 October 2010, following the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) decision to create the MPA on the April 1 2010. This landmark date comes on the same day that conservationists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) highlight in a new paper the damaging effects of over-exploitative [commercial fishing](#) in the area.

It is estimated that around 60,000 sharks, an equivalent number of rays, and potentially countless other species have been legally caught as by-catch from commercial fisheries over the past five years in Chagos.

The paper also draws together evidence that large-scale MPAs can have a positive effect on migratory species such as tuna. Until today, tuna was the main target of commercial fishing around the Chagos Archipelago.

Conservationists now hope this scientifically important MPA, which has the world's cleanest sea water, can be used as a comparative site to ailing reefs affected by human impact, climate change and rising sea temperatures.



Dr. Heather Koldewey, who manages ZSL's international marine and freshwater conservation program, says: "The implementation of a no-take marine reserve in the Chagos will provide a highly unique scientific reference site of global importance for studies on both pelagic and benthic marine ecosystems and the effects of climate change on them.

"Governments across the world have the power to stop over-exploitation in marine protected areas. We need more ocean reserves like the Chagos Archipelago if we are ever to sustain the world's oceanic ecosystems."

Currently it is estimated that 1.17 per cent of the world's ocean is under some form of marine protection, with only 0.08 per cent of these protected areas classified as no-take zones. Scientists are urging governments to establish more MPAs if they are ever to meet the agreed target of 10 per cent by 2012, agreed at the 2002 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Alistair Gammell, director of the Pew Environment Group's Chagos campaign, said: "We are thrilled that the protection of the Chagos announced by the British Government has come into effect. This end to commercial fishing in the Chagos will help its marine wildlife to recover and thrive."

Provided by Zoological Society of London

Citation: Chagos Archipelago becomes a no fishing zone (2010, November 1) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-chagos-archipelago-fishing-zone.html>

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