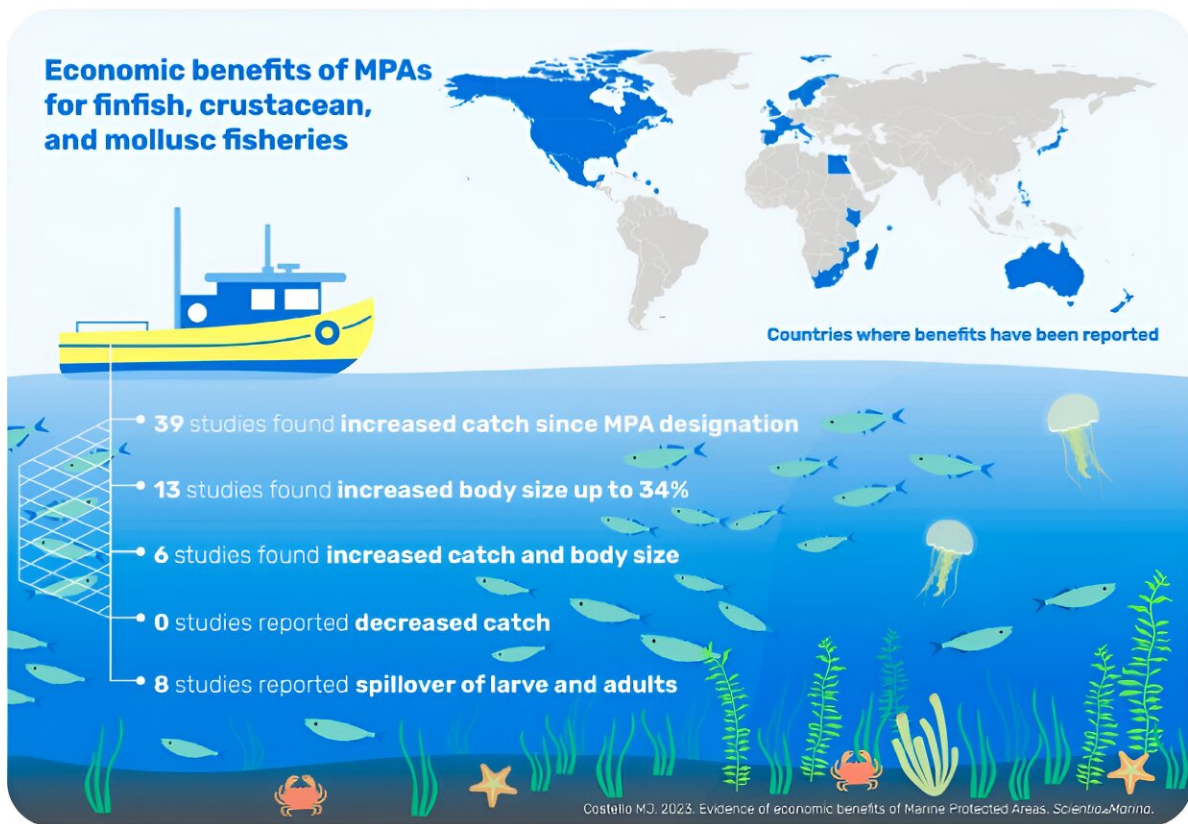


# Study of 34 countries finds ocean protection delivers overlooked economic benefits to fishing, tourism

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Infographic with summarized information of benefits of MPAs for fisheries, as derived from the papers analyzed in this study. Credit: *Scientia Marina* (2024). DOI: 10.3989/scimar.05417.080

In the most comprehensive assessment of its kind to date, a new study released today reveals that marine protected areas (MPAs, national parks at sea) deliver a range of economic benefits to the fishing and tourism industries. The study examined more than 50 protected areas in more than 30 countries in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania representing diverse ecosystems to find that, in all cases, MPAs boosted either fishing or tourism, with some profits in the billions.

"In every corner of the globe, [ocean protection](#) boosts economies," said Dr. Mark John Costello, the study author and a professor at Norway's Nord University. "For far too long, marine parks have been overlooked as GDP generators and job creators. This study offers the strongest evidence yet that protecting the ocean replenishes it with abundant fish, protects it against climate change, but also boosts local and national economies. Now, we can add tourism operators and fisheries to the list of ocean protection beneficiaries."

The study builds on research that has found fully [protected areas](#) can help restore [fish populations](#) by 500% on average, yield bigger fish over time, and help replenish fisheries around the MPAs because of the spillover of fish and invertebrates. It points to many examples from around the world showing that MPAs produce spillover that increases the catches of species from small and sedentary—such as lobsters and scallops—to large and migratory, such as tuna.

In the [study](#), "Evidence of economic benefits from marine protected areas," published in *Scientia Marina*, Costello reviewed 200 studies on marine protected areas to determine the extent to which MPAs deliver economic benefits. The studies looked at 51 MPAs representing a diversity of ecosystems, from [coral reefs](#), [kelp forests](#), mangroves, rocky reefs, and salt marshes, to mudflats and sandy and muddy seabed habitats. The MPAs used a range of protection methods—with some

allowing or restricting many human activities and others banning human activities altogether.

The study comes as countries race to protect 30% of the ocean—from the current 3% to 8% (depending on what is counted as really protected)—in just six years to prevent the loss of species and benefits the ocean provides—from climate resilience to food provision.

"Outdated misconceptions about the economic impacts of marine protected areas are blocking progress on the world's urgent conservation goal," remarked Enric Sala, founder of National Geographic Pristine Seas and author of the award-winning book "The Nature of Nature," who was not involved in the study. "This study demonstrates that both fishing and tourism benefit from national parks of the sea—a final blow to the argument that conservation is costly and harms fishing."

"The ocean is under threat from us. Science shows that establishing [national parks](#) at sea will help ocean life to bounce back—and provide more benefits to humanity. Governments should move the establishment of marine protected areas to the top of their agendas. "Right now, only about 8% of the ocean is protected to some degree, which means we'll need to add new protected areas every week to reach the 2030 ambition," Sala noted.

The new study finds that economic benefits to fisheries from MPAs were reported for 25 countries spanning the North Atlantic, North Pacific, South Pacific and Indian oceans. Benefits to fisheries adjacent to the protected areas were detected in 46 (90%) of the MPAs, including an increased fishery catch (76%) and body size (25%), and detection of spillover (16%). The MPAs that delivered the most economic benefits were strictly protected, where fishing and other damaging activities are banned. These are also known as no-take marine reserves. Currently, only ~3% of the global ocean is under this type of full protection.

"Significantly, the study finds no evidence anywhere, at any time, that MPAs imperil the fishing industry, which has traditionally been an outspoken opponent of ocean protection. The fishing industry has historically sought to block no-take MPAs, arguing that banning fishing delivers a blow to profits. What this study unequivocally shows is that MPAs that ban fishing are not only more profitable, they are also cheaper to manage and maintain than MPAs with more complex fishing rules," said Costello.

Examples of [economic benefits](#) from tourism were found in 24 countries in tropical and sub-tropical locations, as well as temperate regions, which include France, Spain, Italy and New Zealand. Coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass ecosystems were the most profitable, with some individual MPAs generating billions of dollars in revenue each year. This group of marine reserves included: the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia (US\$6.4 million), the Galápagos Marine Reserve, Ecuador; Mu Ko Phi Phi Marine National Park, Thailand; and Ras Mohammed National Park, Red Sea, Egypt. These examples show that more established MPAs provided higher tourism revenues.

**More information:** Mark John Costello, Evidence of economic benefits from marine protected areas, *Scientia Marina* (2024). [DOI: 10.3989/scimar.05417.080](https://doi.org/10.3989/scimar.05417.080)

Provided by National Geographic Pristine Seas

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