

Marine conservation must consider human rights

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Marine conservation needs to take into account vulnerable groups such as these Indigenous Moken fishing for crab near the Thai-Myanmar border. Credit: Nathan Bennett, University of Washington/University of British Columbia

Ocean conservation is essential for protecting the marine environment

and safeguarding the resources that people rely on for livelihoods and food security. But there are many documented cases where conservation has bumped up against the people who share the same places and resources, even leading to human rights abuses.

"Often the impacts of marine protected areas can undermine people's rights or stop them from doing their livelihoods," said Bennett, lead author of a new study published today in *Marine Policy* and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia and the University of Washington. "There is a real danger that in pushing for [marine conservation](#), socially unjust or inappropriate actions could be promoted, including those leading to displacement, violence, marginalization and poverty."

Both the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Aichi Targets have set goals to have 10% of the ocean be designated as [marine protected areas](#) by 2020. But currently there are no standards for how conservation is done. Doctors, lawyers, engineers and many other professions have codes of conduct, should one exist for conservation?

A global group of oceans science practitioners and scientists argue yes - it is "warranted, urgent and past due", in their new paper "An appeal for a code of conduct for marine conservation". In it, they outline what that code could look like, with considerations for fair governance, social justice and accountability practices. This code could be widely used by governments, researchers, NGOs, private sector and local organizations to review such issues around human rights, indigenous rights, food and livelihood security, benefit sharing, conflict resolution, and more.



Marine conservation efforts are often promoted and implemented in areas where hard-working small-scale fishermen live and have fished for generations. Ao Phang Nga, Thailand. Credit: Nathan Bennett, University of Washington/University of British Columbia

"This is urgent, we need thoughtful actions to conserve the [marine environment](#), but we need to do it in an equitable way, with respect for fishers' livelihoods, food sovereignty and dignity," said Yoshitaka Ota, co-author and Nippon Foundation-UBC Nereus Program Director of Policy. "Most importantly, conservation is the art of finding a better way to live with the environment because we will always be a part of it."

The authors recognize that accountability is a challenge - whether such a code of conduct would be voluntary or whether conservation needs an independent auditing system. Creating a code of conduct would allow for a more coordinated effort to happen internationally to merge the human dimension into the mainstream of conservation. "This is an important investment that the conservation community needs to prioritize," said Bennett. "Investing in a code of conduct will pay dividends by increasing

the acceptance and effectiveness of conservation."

"The key is 'being there' to understand people, their rights and their needs" said Lydia Teh, co-author and Nippon Foundation-UBC Nereus Program Research Associate. "A successful approach for marine [conservation](#) is through bottom-up processes which work with local people and develop their capacity to manage the resources and decide on areas for protection."

Provided by University of British Columbia

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