



A Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Chagos

Response on behalf of IUCN and its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Consultation on whether to establish a Marine Protected Area in the Chagos Archipelago/British Indian Ocean Territory

Summary

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) supports the creation of a full marine reserve in Chagos, encompassing the whole of the territorial waters and the Environmental Preservation and Protection Zone (EPPZ)/Fisheries Conservation and Management Zone (FCMZ) of the Chagos archipelago. IUCN also recognises the essential involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the consultation towards the establishment of an MPA, and considers it essential that the outcome be reached through agreement of all such stakeholders.

Full protection is preferable to protecting only some areas or features of the archipelago or restricting only certain extractive uses as it will realize greater conservation benefits which will sustain and build over time. This includes, for example, more comprehensive and effective protection to the full range of ecosystems and habitats in the archipelago, securing a refuge for many threatened species. In particular the global fishing effort for tuna has led to great reduction in abundance around the globe. The protection of the Chagos EPPZ and FCMZ would provide needed relief for tuna and other pelagic species in the Indian Ocean. It would also enhance the value of the archipelago as a vital scientific reference site for marine as well as climatologic research and monitoring; and lead to a greater positive impact of the Chagos marine protected area outside its boundaries, as a fully functional ecological stepping stone and source of larvae. It will also constitute a highly significant contribution towards meeting international and national protected area targets, and provide a global conservation legacy for future generations.

IUCN's support for protection of the marine environment of the Chagos archipelago is not intended to and does not imply the taking, the endorsement or the acceptance on the part of

IUCN of any position on the dispute between the UK, and Mauritius concerning sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago. Before any decision is made as to protected area status, IUCN would also expect that all concerned parties, including former inhabitants of Chagos, have been properly consulted and their views duly considered.

The purpose and intent of this IUCN submission, therefore, are simply to underscore what IUCN sees as a unique opportunity to extend the highest forms of protection to a significant part of the Indian Ocean, where coral reefs are in good health and marine species can find a refuge.

The Importance of Chagos

A biodiversity hope-spot: Chagos is home to a broad range of marine ecosystems, ranging from the healthiest, most resilient coral re

- **It would provide more comprehensive and effective protection to the full range of ecosystems and habitats in the archipelago, en**

held in MPAs by 20%. This would constitute a significant gain on global targets for marine environmental protection, and demonstrate global leadership on marine conservation.

Such an MPA would constitute both a lifeline for the worlds' troubled oceans, and an outstanding legacy for present and future generations.

Further considerations

IUCN with its constituent Commissions is the worlds' foremost network of technical expertise with respect to protected areas. We recognize that the establishment of any MPA requires the best available scientific input (ecological and socioeconomic) as well as involvement of all stakeholders, and encourage the FCO to continue its broad consultation in taking this process further. Importantly this should entail continued commitment to best practice and an adaptive approach to management, including sound assessment of management effectiveness. This will serve all stakeholders and the environment of Chagos alike.

The recommendations herein are provided based on the present situation and with the aim of securing the greatest global benefits of the Chagos archipelago. Irrespective of the legal process regarding resettlement and of its outcome, it is clear that actions that maximize the environmental health of the Chagos archipelago, and the functions and services that it provides, will best contribute towards that end. In the future, geopolitical and legal developments as well as environmental change may warrant a reassessment of the protection status and management strategies – indeed such reassessments are an integral part of effective MPA management – but awarding full protection to the entire Chagos archipelago and the whole of the territorial waters and EPPZ/FCMZ will greatly enhance their value and will serve the best interests of all concerned parties, now and in the future.

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