

“EMPAFISH”

Marine Protected Areas in southern Europe as a tool for ecosystem conservation and fisheries management

There is growing concern that traditional fishery management measures are failing to meet their declared objectives and, consequently, many fisheries are on the verge of collapse. Marine protected areas (MPAs) are seen as an instrument for improving both fisheries management and marine environmental protection. To be effective, their primary objectives must be clearly defined and they must be properly managed. These tasks include site selection, zoning, planning and implementing a surveillance and enforcement system. It is also important that local communities, including resource users, are fully involved.

In March 2005, 13 south-western European partners with expertise in marine ecology, fisheries and ecological modelling, and coastal area management particularly related to MPAs, joined forces with the ultimate goal to achieve real progress in the management of MPAs in the European context. This is being done through the **EMPAFISH** project, which has as its main goal **to promote a basis for responsible and sustainable fisheries activities that contribute to healthy marine ecosystems, creating an economically viable and competitive fisheries industry, guaranteeing a fair standard for those who depend on fishing activities**. The project’s specific objectives are:

- to investigate the potential of different regimes of MPAs in Europe as measures to protect sensitive and endangered species, habitats and ecosystems from the effects of fishing;
- to develop quantitative methods to assess the effects of marine protected areas; and
- to provide the European Union with a set of integrated measures and policy proposals for the implementation of MPAs as fisheries and ecosystem management tools.

EMPAFISH has selected 20 case studies, where management regimes range from totally prohibited zones (“no take zones”) to protected areas where various levels of fishing are accepted either on a seasonal or activity basis and covering a broad geographical area, from the Mediterranean to the Canary Islands, and the Azores. From these established, well-studied MPAs, existing ecological, fisheries and socio-economic data have been collated and consequently analysed. The results of the analysis have been published as three separate booklets, with are also available from the EMPAFISH web site:

- Ecological effects of Atlanto-Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas in the European Union.
- Fishery Regimes in Atlanto-Mediterranean European Marine Protected Areas.
- Economic Analysis of Marine Protected Areas. A literature review.

Meta-analysis and modelling of the field database, consisting of the collected data, is ongoing. The resulting model of an FP5-funded project, the BEMMFISH project (Q5RS-2001-01533), is being used in the quantitative analysis of the socio-economic effects of MPAs. This model accounts for multiple



Project acronym:

EMPAFISH

Full title of Project:

European marine protected areas as tools for fisheries management and conservation

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Web-site:

www.um.es/empafish

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“IN ORDER TO PROMOTE THE INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS, THE PROJECT WILL CONVENE A STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE OR “REFERENCE USER GROUP” (RUG)“

species and multi-species interactions, multiple fleets (disaggregated at the level of vessel) and gear types.

In addition, a set of indicators is being chosen to represent the performance of MPAs with respect to their objectives under the different management regimes and MPA typologies identified. The indicators are intended to enhance communication, transparency, effectiveness and accountability in the management of MPAs.

Based on the results obtained, EMPAFISH finally aims to produce guidelines and tools, to be integrated into the decision-making and management process, that will provide an improved basis for designing, selecting and managing protected areas. It will seek to identify the relationships between management and protection initiatives and their effects on biodiversity and fish and invertebrate stocks. In addition, management plans and tools to harmonize fisheries, conservation and other productive uses will be formulated.

In order to promote the involvement of stakeholders, the project will convene a stakeholders committee or

“Reference User Group” (RUG) comprising administrators (local, regional and national), fisheries managers, fishermen’s organisations and other social stakeholders (tourist consortia responsible for diving activities and affected by the development of MPAs).

EMPAFISH directly addresses the policy priority for assessing the potential of marine protected areas for marine environment protection and fisheries management (COM(2001)143). The project will support the EU in pursuing its objectives for the conservation of marine biodiversity and the establishment of MPAs, as agreed in various international agreements, including the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. Moreover, EMPAFISH will provide an assessment of the value and guidelines for implementing MPAs as an option in future fishery management regulations.

EMPAFISH has, together with the PROTECT project, been organising the “MPA symposium 2007”, which will take place September 25-28, 2007 in Murcia (Spain). More information about this symposium can be found on www.mpasyposium2007.eu.