save our seas
foundation

press kit

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“As long as there are people who care and take action, we can and will make a difference.”

Abdulmohsen Abdulmalik Al-Sheikh
Founder and President of the Save Our Seas Foundation

About the Save Our Seas Foundation

Story

The Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) is a philanthropic organisation committed to the care and protection of the world's oceans. Focusing primarily on endangered shark and ray species, it encourages and supports cutting-edge research, conservation and education projects.

The Save Our Seas Foundation was founded in Geneva, Switzerland, on 23 September 2003 by His Excellency Abdulmohsen Abdulmalik Al-Sheik, a keen scuba diver with a deep passion for the marine environment. While exploring the world's oceans over the past three decades, he has witnessed at first hand the severe impact of human intervention on marine ecosystems, especially on large predators like sharks. It was this that inspired him to help combat the threats faced by sharks and rays by setting up the SOSF, and His Excellency maintains an active role in the foundation, working closely with its management team.

The Save Our Seas Foundation's ultimate goal is to create a legacy of securing the health and sustainability of our oceans, and the communities that depend on them, for generations to come. To this end, the foundation has supported almost 400 projects in more than 80 countries around the globe over the past 18 years, passionately upholding the Founder's wish for the foundation to make a real and lasting impact on the health of our oceans and ultimately for every person on the planet.

Mission statement

In the effort to protect our oceans, the Save Our Seas Foundation funds and supports research, conservation and education projects worldwide, focusing primarily on charismatic threatened wildlife and their habitats.

Philosophy

The challenges faced by our oceans and their inhabitants today are severe. To combat these and to bring about sustainable and effective change, there is a need to weave together the strands of research, conservation and education.

The foundation's course of action is to invest in early-career professionals, encourage local actions by local people and foster awareness beyond the boundaries of traditional scientific publications.

Ultimately, the cornerstone of the Save Our Seas Foundation's success rests on a small team of passionate people who collaborate constantly, communicate clearly and effectively, are always looking for innovative approaches and have a strong sense of commitment.

In 2021 the Save Our Seas Foundation celebrated its 18th anniversary and, with the experience and maturity it has gained during this period, it looks forward to the next decade as an ongoing evolution of its conservation strategy.

Facts and figures

Predators or prey?

Approximately 500 species of sharks are found in the world. They have inhabited our oceans for more than 400 million years, pre-dating the first dinosaurs by 100 million years, and they appear in every single ocean, playing a crucial role in the health of the marine ecosystem.

Due to threats such as overfishing, climate change, habitat loss and persecution, many shark populations have declined by more than 90%. Over 100 million sharks are killed annually in commercial fisheries, resulting in such severe declines in some species that more than a quarter of shark species and their relatives are considered Threatened or Near Threatened with extinction on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Despite these declines, comparatively few sharks species are listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which poses strict controls on the international trade in listed species. The first sharks to be included were basking and whale sharks in 2003, and by 2016 a total of 12 shark species and all manta and devil ray species were listed in Appendix II, as well as sawfish species in Appendix I. In 2019 a further 18 species were added (mako sharks, guitarfishes and wedgefishes).

While progress has been made to improve the management and conservation of shark populations globally, more than 80% of the international shark fin trade that drives shark fisheries is unregulated. Most sharks and ray species are highly vulnerable to overfishing, as they grow slowly, mature late and live for a long time. They typically fulfil an important role as predators in their ecosystems, so the decline of shark populations is likely to have a cascading effect on the abundance and distribution of other species, threatening ecosystems and food supplies with unpredictable consequences.

3 education and research centres

save our seas shark education centre

save our seas d'arros research centre

save our seas shark research center

The Save Our Seas Foundation Shark Education Centre

Ideally situated at the edge of False Bay in Cape Town, South Africa, the Save Our Seas Foundation Shark Education Centre (SOSF Shark Education Centre) overlooks the bay and the distant Hottentots Holland Mountains. It was established in 2008 on the doorstep of the Dalebrook Marine Protected Area, a sanctuary zone within the greater Table Mountain National Park Marine Protected Area. This unique location enables the centre to immerse children and adults in experientially focused educational activities.

The SOSF Education Centre is open throughout the year for school and group visits. It boasts a carefully selected collection of state-of-the-art exhibits that focus mostly on sharks. There is, however, also a strong emphasis on the unique and special marine ecosystem found in and around False Bay.

Groups of schoolchildren come through the centre and leave feeling inspired to care about sharks and their ocean habitats. But it is not only school visits that are catered for; there are also outreach events, holiday clubs, marine awareness camps, marine explorers' clubs and many other activities.

The centre also invites the general public to explore its displays. Ultimately, its goal is to nurture ocean awareness and environmentally responsible actions. The SOSF Education Centre welcomes thousands of visitors every year, half of which were schoolchildren.

The Save Our Seas Foundation D'Arros Research Centre

The Save Our Seas Foundation D'Arros Research Centre (SOSF-DRC) is based on D'Arros Island, 225 kilometres south-west of Mahe, in the Seychelles. D'Arros Island is very close to St Joseph Atoll, and both are part of a small chain of islands that comprise the Amirantes Group. Although D'Arros Island and St Joseph Atoll are separated by a channel one kilometre (0.6 mile) wide and 70 metres (230 feet) deep, they are considered a single ecological unit as their ecosystems are inextricably linked. The marine environment surrounding D'Arros Island and St Joseph Atoll boasts a diversity of habitats and species, providing an outstanding ocean observatory for scientific studies.

The SOSF-DRC vision is to be a Centre of Excellence for marine and tropical island conservation. Therefore, the preservation of the ecological integrity of D'Arros Island and St Joseph Atoll through research, monitoring, restoration and education is a high priority for the centre. Since its inception in 2012, the centre has concluded numerous targeted research projects in collaboration with various international institutions. These diverse projects have focused mostly on threatened species such as sharks, turtles, seabirds, fish and corals, but have also included habitat assessments, feasibility surveys and oceanography.

In March 2020, the waters surrounding D'Arros Island and St Joseph Atoll were declared marine protected areas as part of the Seychelles' larger Marine Spatial Plan Initiative. D'Arros Island has been declared as its own Zone 1 (no extractive use), with St Joseph Atoll part of a larger Zone 2 (conditional use).

The Save Our Seas Shark Research Center

The Save Our Seas Shark Research Center is located in Florida, USA, and was established at Nova Southeastern University in 2009 by directive of the founder of the Save Our Seas Foundation. Nova Southeastern University is also home to the Guy Harvey Research Institute and the Center of Excellence for Coral Reef Ecosystems Research, both of which conduct collaborative research with the Save Our Seas Shark Research Center.

The vision of the research centre is to be a global Centre of Excellence for scientific discovery on sharks and rays. The centre's major focus is to conduct targeted and impactful scientific research to improve management, conservation, recovery and understanding of the world's sharks and rays. A hallmark of its work is that it specialises in taking integrative, multi-disciplinary approaches to research and conservation, which include combining high-tech genetics, genomics and field work to illuminate holistically aspects of shark and ray science that would be difficult to decipher using single-discipline approaches alone. Furthermore, as part of a university, the centre perceives its mission to include educational activities that encompass training university students in research and increasing the awareness of schoolchildren about shark and marine conservation.

In February 2019, scientists decoded the genome of the white shark and discovered an astonoishing ability that explains why these sharks have survived over millennia. This major disconery may have an impact on how we understand and manage human age-related diseases in the future.

Foundation grants

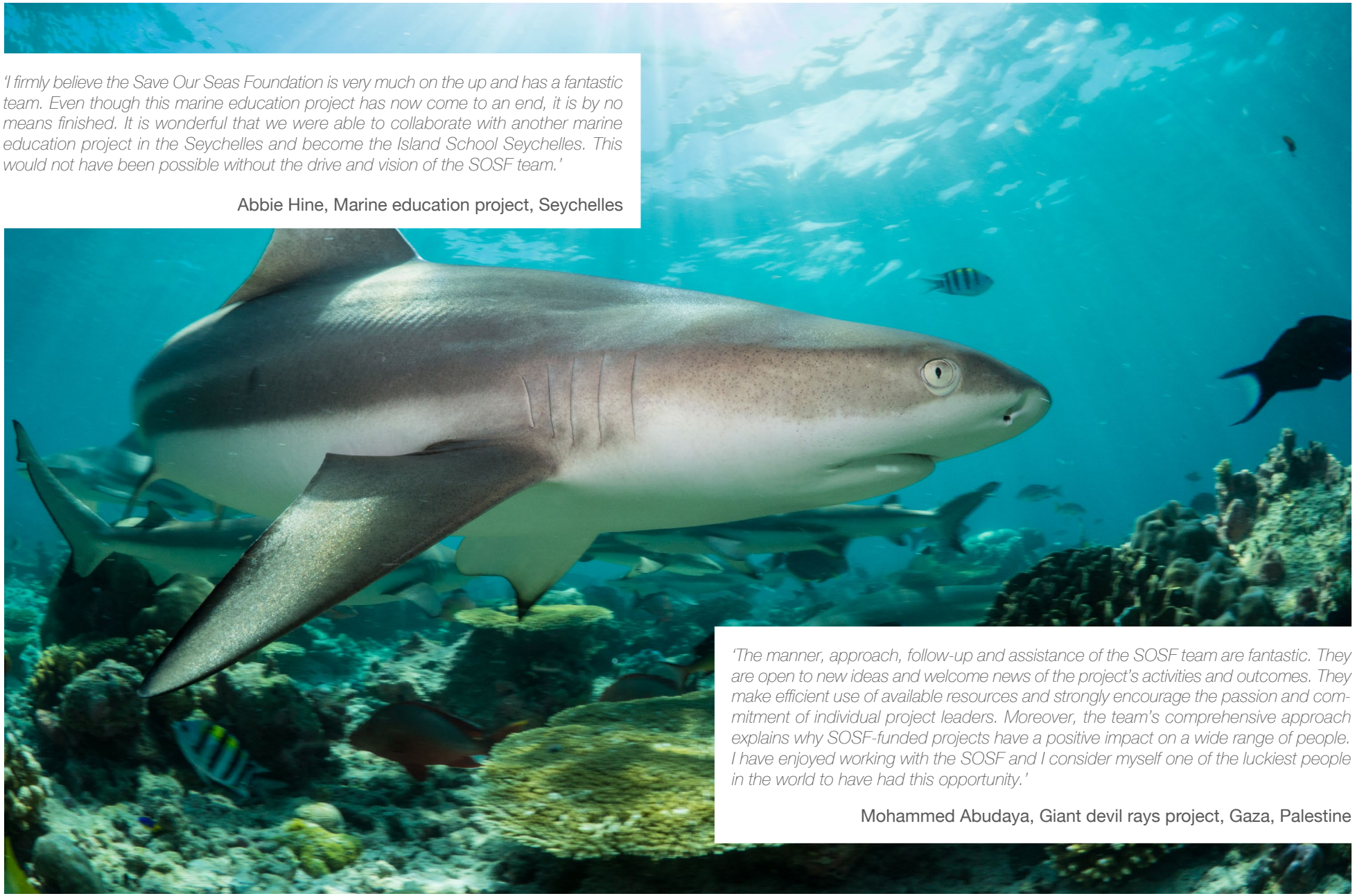
The Save Our Seas Foundation offers a series of grants dedicated mainly to projects on elasmobranchs (sharks, rays and skates). Most of these projects currently fall into the areas of research, conservation and education and are capable of attracting significant public attention, potentially increasing public and government awareness of the urgent need to protect the marine environment.

These grants help nurture early-career professionals (within five years of a degree being awarded) who are eager to make a positive change, while at the same time encouraging local initiatives carried out by local people. The foundation collaborates closely with project leaders to provide guidance as well as to help the projects gain international visibility and recognition through regular communication on the SOSF website and social media channels and at public conferences and school workshops.

The main categories of the Save Our Seas Foundation grant programme are: the Small Grant, designed to last between 12 and 18 months; the Keystone Grant with a duration limited to three years; and the Long-term Partners category, which supports the long-term research and conservation projects of certain NGO partners that are close to the SOSF in terms of funding and communication.

The application process, deadlines and conditions vary depending on the grant category. All applications are reviewed by the Save Our Seas Foundation's scientific committee and final approval is given by its board.

The Save our Seas Foundation has announced 61 grants for 2021, the largest cohort of awards in its 18-year history. Young scientists, local leaders and educators lead the charge on issues of illegal trade, marine protected area (MPA) expansion, climate change and overfishing. Their solutions are tech-savvy (from DNA testing kits to smartphone apps) to visionary (designing MPAs for sharks) and also herald a new era of compassion as they gather local histories and look to a brighter future.



'I firmly believe the Save Our Seas Foundation is very much on the up and has a fantastic team. Even though this marine education project has now come to an end, it is by no means finished. It is wonderful that we were able to collaborate with another marine education project in the Seychelles and become the Island School Seychelles. This would not have been possible without the drive and vision of the SOSF team.'

Abbie Hine, Marine education project, Seychelles

'The manner, approach, follow-up and assistance of the SOSF team are fantastic. They are open to new ideas and welcome news of the project's activities and outcomes. They make efficient use of available resources and strongly encourage the passion and commitment of individual project leaders. Moreover, the team's comprehensive approach explains why SOSF-funded projects have a positive impact on a wide range of people. I have enjoyed working with the SOSF and I consider myself one of the luckiest people in the world to have had this opportunity.'

Mohammed Abudaya, Giant devil rays project, Gaza, Palestine

A number of independent organisations are conducting valuable long-term research and conservation projects of their own. Over the past 18 years, the Save Our Seas Foundation has supported the efforts of five NGOs that are close to it in terms of funding and communication. These grant programmes last longer than the Small Grant and Keystone Grant.

Partners

The Manta Trust

Formed in 2011, the Manta Trust is a UK-registered charity that coordinates global research and conservation efforts in respect of mobulids (members of the subfamily Mobulinae, to which manta and devil rays belong). Its mission is to conserve mobulid rays, their relatives and their habitats through a combination of research, education and collaboration.
The SOSF has supported the Manta Trust from the outset, not only providing funding and guidance for its projects, but also facilitating international cooperation among manta researchers to forge a global conservation plan of action.

The Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation

Established and incorporated in 1990 by Dr Samuel Gruber, today the Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation is a non-profit organisation located on the island of South Bimini in The Bahamas. Its mission is to advance our knowledge of the biology of marine animals, especially sharks and rays; to educate future scientists; and to disseminate research results to advance the field of marine science and conservation biology, and to the public as well.
The SOSF enjoys a close, long-term working relationship with the Bimini Biological Field Station Foundation, supporting it with funding and maintaining an active communication link.

Shark Spotters

Started in 2004 in response to a spate of shark bite incidents and increased shark sightings, Shark Spotters is shark safety and research organisation based in the small surf town of Muizenberg on the Cape Peninsula, near Cape Town, South Africa. Shark Spotters improves beach safety by applying innovative and responsible shark safety solutions that pro-actively reduce interactions and conflict between recreational water-users and white sharks.
In 2009 the SOSF began co-funding the programme. In addition to funds, it contributes organisational support and plays an active role in helping to educate the public about sharks and shark safety.

BC Whales

BC Whales, also known as the North Coast Cetacean Society, is a non-profit whale research organisation that was started 18 years ago on a small island on the remote northern coast of British Columbia, Canada. It is dedicated to the research and protection of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) along that stretch of coastline.
Funding support from the SOSF has enabled BC Whales to continue its work. It is hoped that sufficient data will be accumulated over the next few years to convince Canada's government to declare Caamano Sound critical habitat for orcas.

The Acoustic Tracking Array Platform

Since 2011, the Acoustic Tracking Array Platform (ATAP) has been providing a service to the worldwide marine animal tracking community by monitoring the movements and migrations of inshore species. It forms part of the global Ocean Tracking Network, which monitors 140 species in 29 countries, and since its launch has deployed approximately 200 acoustic receivers along two-thirds of South Africa's coastal waters, covering 2,000 kilometres (1,243 miles).
The SOSF has been supporting the ATAP since 2013 by providing funding for the maintenance of the receiver network. It also fosters collaboration with the ATAP as many of our South Africa-based project leaders share the same resources.

Sponsorship of scientific conferences

The Save Our Seas Foundation is committed to championing passionate researchers and scientists from around the globe in their efforts to make a positive impact on our oceans and the wildlife that inhabits them. A key part of this is bringing researchers from all parts of the world to share their expertise and work together towards the common goal of sustainable shark conservation. Their success stories have become the fabric of the foundation's mission to raise awareness and facilitate effective conservation policies at local, national and international levels. The SOSF is therefore proud to be a sponsor of scientific conferences that focus on elasmobranchs around the world and thus being a driving force in the protection of charismatic megafauna and the restoration of their populations and habitats.

Raising awareness

Determined to expand its role as a non-profit organisation, the Save Our Seas Foundation is committed to the care and protection of the world's oceans beyond its support of research, conservation and education projects by undertaking activities that promote public awareness. By sharing videos, striking imagery, books and magazines, the foundation employs the power of communication to connect with and engage the public to transform our relationship with sharks and the oceans.

Website and social media

The foundation has a far-reaching online presence that compares very favourably to those of similar charitable organisations. The website www.saveourseas has more than 12k visits each month, while Facebook, Instagram and Twitter garner 145k, more than 200k and more than 150k followers respectively.

Magazine

Save Our Seas, the SOSF magazine is an award-winning visual celebration of the foundation's work, where readers can get a glimpse of the exciting projects it supports. In addition, the magazine represents the SOSF's efforts to produce a model for conservation media, blending compelling visuals with intriguing editorial content.

Video photo book

By supporting the creation of videos, the SOSF offers beautiful and inspiring visual journeys into our oceans. These videos enthral and move viewers, while highlighting some of the key reasons for protecting our astonishing aquatic world.
Believing that the right picture can have unparalleled power to inspire and be a decisive instrument of change, the foundation in the past awarded grants that nurtured emerging marine photojournalists.
More than 20 publications have been supported by the SOSF, including books for children, teachers' handbooks, identification guides and guidelines. Each book has a unique story, but all together they make a resounding statement for the importance of protecting the marine environment. A number of these publications are freely available on the website.

Community engagement

The SOSF has supported many educational projects around the world, raising awareness of the marine environment and the threats it faces, and promoting conservation. Through encouraging projects to actively engage their local communities in experienced-based learning, the foundation aims to provide people with a greater understanding of marine resources and develop their conservation ethic.

Achievements

Since its inception in 2003, the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) has supported nearly 400 projects on 165 marine species in over 85 countries, creating a community of more than 300 scientists, conservationists, students and educators who share its common objective. These project leaders have worked closely with fishing industries, businesses, divers and the public to enact positive change and raise awareness within communities.
The most important tool for successful conservation is knowledge. Scientific information is one of several important factors in environmental policy-making. The Save Our Seas Foundation is therefore proud to have supported numerous projects that have helped fill the gaps in our knowledge about sharks and rays, contributing to a better understanding of their conservation needs. Collectively, SOSF projects produce between 30 and 40 peer-reviewed scientific publications each year.
In addition to facilitating research and informing policy, it is critical to raise general awareness of shark conservation issues through education and media and to engage communities and promote action to ensure that our oceans remain healthy for generations to come. To this end, the foundation has a multifaceted communication strategy with considerable outreach: the website www.saveourseas.com receives ~12k visits each month, while Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have over 145k, 200k and 150k followers respectively.
The Save Our Seas magazine bridges the gap between the innovative shark research being done by project leaders and the wider reach of their conservation messages to a public audience. A dedicated education centre in South Africa welcomed thousands of visitors every year, half of which were children from local communities.
In 2021 the foundation celebrated its 18th anniversary, having matured into an established support and advocate of marine conservation on a global scale. Moving forward, the foundation strives to further develop its strategy and efforts to secure the health of our oceans, and the sharks and rays that live in them, for generations to come.

Frequently asked questions

Shark conservation has come a long way since the 1990s, but where are the gaps today?

There are still huge gaps in the capacity of many countries to monitor sharks and manage fisheries. More than 80 countries are sending shark fins to Singapore, Hong Kong and China, but only a very small proportion of those countries can actually manage their fisheries well. The crisis is not so much out on the high seas; the major challenges now are in biodiversity-rich coastal waters. It is here that sharks are primarily taken as part of multi-species fisheries, which are much, much harder to manage.

Why are Marine Protected Areas important?

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) typically restrict access and activities in certain ocean habitats and are a common tool used to combat overfishing and promote ecosystem recovery, especially in tropical ecosystems. MPAs come in various shapes and sizes and with varying levels of legislation and enforcement, ranging from fully zoned, multi-use areas to those where entry is strictly prohibited. By promoting the recovery of ecosystems, it is intended that MPAs may themselves become a resource, suppor- ting both fisheries through regional recruitment and tourism through the preservation of natural beauty.

When looking at funding proposals, how does the SOSF choose a project to support?

The answer is based on questions like ‘So what? Is the proposal a research project or a survey? What happens next? What will this do? What is the spin-off going to be? How will this help us to improve management? How is this going to save sharks?’

Once a project is complete, how is its success measured?

There are two ways to answer that. One is, did it do what it said it was going to do? Has it met its objectives? But something else is happening beyond that, and it’s great. In the case of the devil ray project in Gaza, for example, it did its work on devil rays and achieved its goal. However, it also created an advocate for sharks and rays, someone who now lives and breathes sharks and rays and is getting lots and lots of students interested in them too. That would never have happened had it not been for that small project that was looking into devil rays.

Why is it important that we protect sawfishes if there are so few of them left?

Sawfishes are top predators in river, mangrove and coastal ecosystems, so they help to keep these ecosystems in balance. They are also an important part of many traditional cultures in places like Australia, Guinea-Bissau and Panama, so by protecting sawfishes in such areas, we also help to conserve traditional cultures, many of which are also in danger of disappearing. But for the SOSF, it’s simply because they are unique in so many ways. If we can’t save such a weird and wonderful group of species, what hope is there for the rest of the natural world?

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