

The Present State of Tropical Marine Biodiversity Conservation

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The Importance of Marine Biodiversity

Tropical shallow water habitats cover 6,037,100 km² of the sea floor and support the livelihoods of one billion people world wide. Coral reefs alone support 25% of marine biological diversity and provide about US\$30 billion in net benefits world wide.

At the World Summit for Sustainable Development, governments made a commitment to increasing the protection of the marine environment to halt the loss of marine biodiversity, especially in coral reefs and associated tropical shallow water habitats less than 20m deep, such as sea grasses and algal beds. In order to sustain marine biodiversity, research suggests 10-40% of the marine environment should be set aside as protected areas.

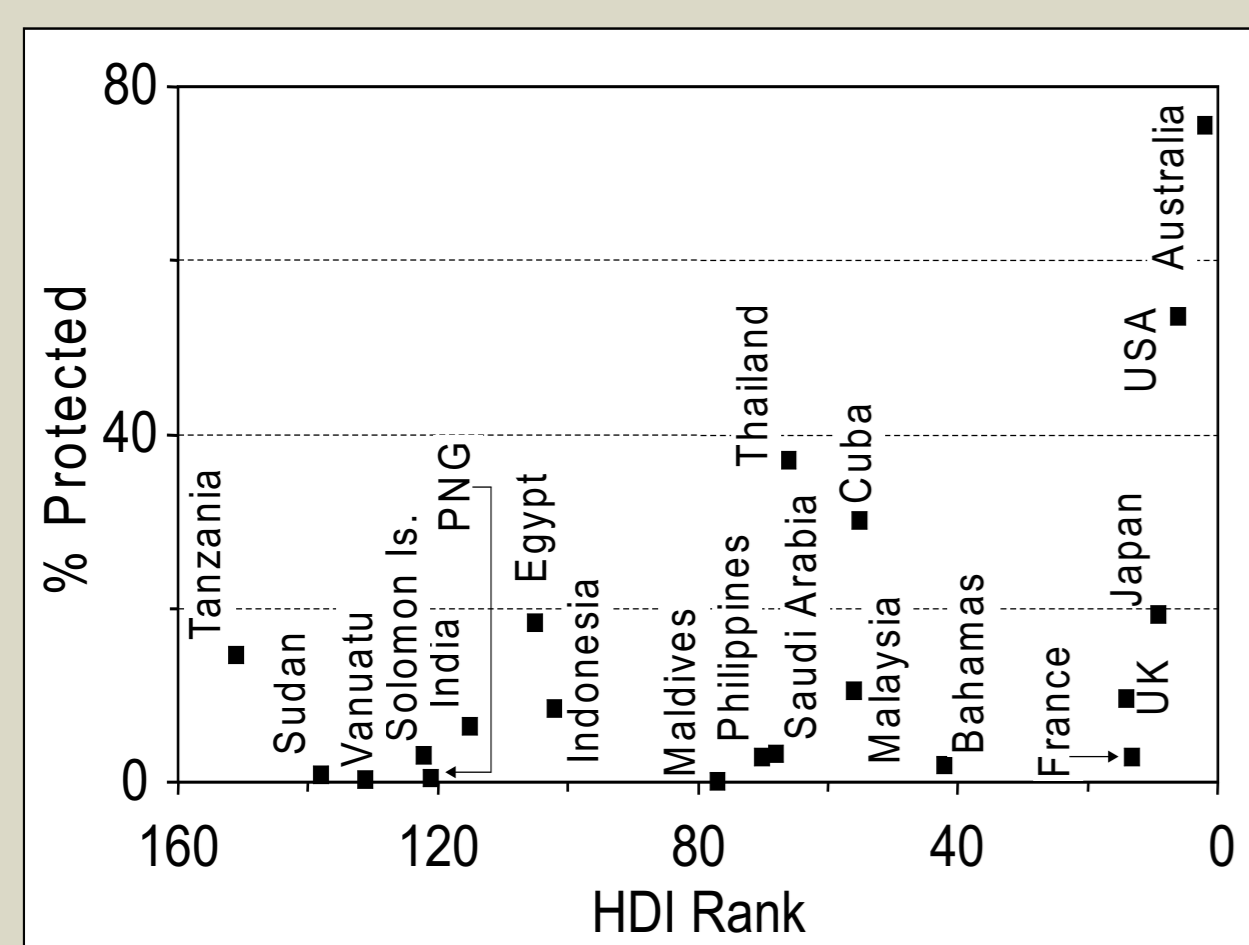
This study used SeaWiFS satellite imagery to find out how much of these valuable habitats are currently protected.

Management of Protected Areas

Over 88% of MPAs are less than 100 km² with a median size of 5km².

Only 4% of coral reefs occur in areas managed under the strictest IUCN categories.

41% are under management categories which allow for sustainable use, and often permit activities which are destructive.



The graphic represents the proportion (% protected) of coral reef which occurs within the boundaries of MPAs in national and overseas territorial waters, compared to development as defined by the Human Development Index (HDI).

Compared to nations with less developed economies, similar proportions of coral reefs are protected by the UK, France and Japan.



How Much is Protected?

7% or 404,400 km² of Shallow Water Habitats (SWH) are currently protected by national or international legislation.

Specifically 20% of the world's 284,300 km² of known coral reefs are protected. This is within the recommendations.

Protected areas are not evenly distributed. 90% occur in just 10 of the 110 countries and territories in which coral reefs are found.

Almost 50% of the world's coral reefs are in the Indian ocean and South East Asia, but less than 15% of these are officially protected.

13% of the world's coral reefs are found in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Australia, which represents 72% of all protected coral reefs.

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