

Marine Protected Areas Youth Learning Workshop – 6 March 2019

Nicole Wienand, a consultant at CES, attended the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Youth Learning Workshop, hosted at Nelson Mandela University's Ocean Science Campus on the 6th of March 2019. The workshop aimed to increase the knowledge and awareness of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) amongst youth, by equipping young South Africans with the relevant facts and knowledge required to engage in discussions and decision making concerning marine protection and ocean governance.

The workshop included a full day of presentations, with guest speakers Tembisa Jordaan from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and Mandy Lombard from Nelson Mandela University (NMU). This was followed by a Q&A session. The key issues discussed included ocean health and the role of MPAs, the oceans economy and Operation Phakisa, as well as the value, challenges and shortcomings associated with MPAs.

The Y4MPAs and the #OnlyThisMuch campaign is led by young marine scientists, who also presented at the workshop. These young scientists played a critical role in the expansion of South Africa's MPA network. After an interesting and informative day of discussions and presentations, the workshop ended off with an interactive debate about MPAs, in the form of a role-play.

Below are some interesting facts about South Africa's MPAs that were discussed during the workshop.

The IUCN defines Marine Protected Areas as *"a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values"*. Conserving and protecting the ocean and its resources is in the best interests of all people, as the ocean provides the human population with food, oxygen, and numerous ecosystem services. The ocean also plays a vital role in the world's carbon cycle by storing an estimated 93% of the earth's carbon as dissolved gas or in algae, coral, and marine sediments.

Although South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers a greater area than its land surface area, only 0.4% of it was protected prior to the establishment of the country's 20 new MPAs in October 2018. The establishment of these new MPAs and subsequent expansion of South Africa's MPA network, has increased the protection of our country's ocean from 0.4% to 5% - an area equivalent to 50 000 km² (Figure 1). This expansion considerably advances ecotourism and the preservation of the country's ocean heritage for future generations.

Despite this, South Africa is still short of the 10% target set for 2020 at the Convention of Biological Diversity in 2004. The question remains, even if the 10% is achieved, is this enough to protect the world's most valuable asset? Research suggests that in order to effectively conserve the world's oceans and its resources, a minimum of 37% should be formally conserved. The next target set for the expansion of South Africa's MPA network is 30% by 2030.

The benefits of MPAs include increased resilience and maintenance of ecosystem services, protection of biodiversity, fisheries spill over, and protection of cultural values. But it was clear from the workshop that there are several issues concerning MPA expansion in South Africa. This was of particular interest and included questions such as how will these areas be managed effectively, how can government better include local communities in the planning of future MPAs, which areas and/or ecosystems will be included in the future MPA network expansion, and how can marine spatial planning incorporate the fisheries industry, the oil and gas industry, and MPAs in a fair and just manner without them overlapping in space?

As coastal and environmental advisors, it is important that we are aware of current trends regarding marine protection, MPA network expansion and ocean governance in South Africa, so that we are able to take these factors into consideration when dealing with future development plans. For additional information and an interactive map of South Africa's MPAs, please see <https://www.marineprotectedareas.org.za/>.

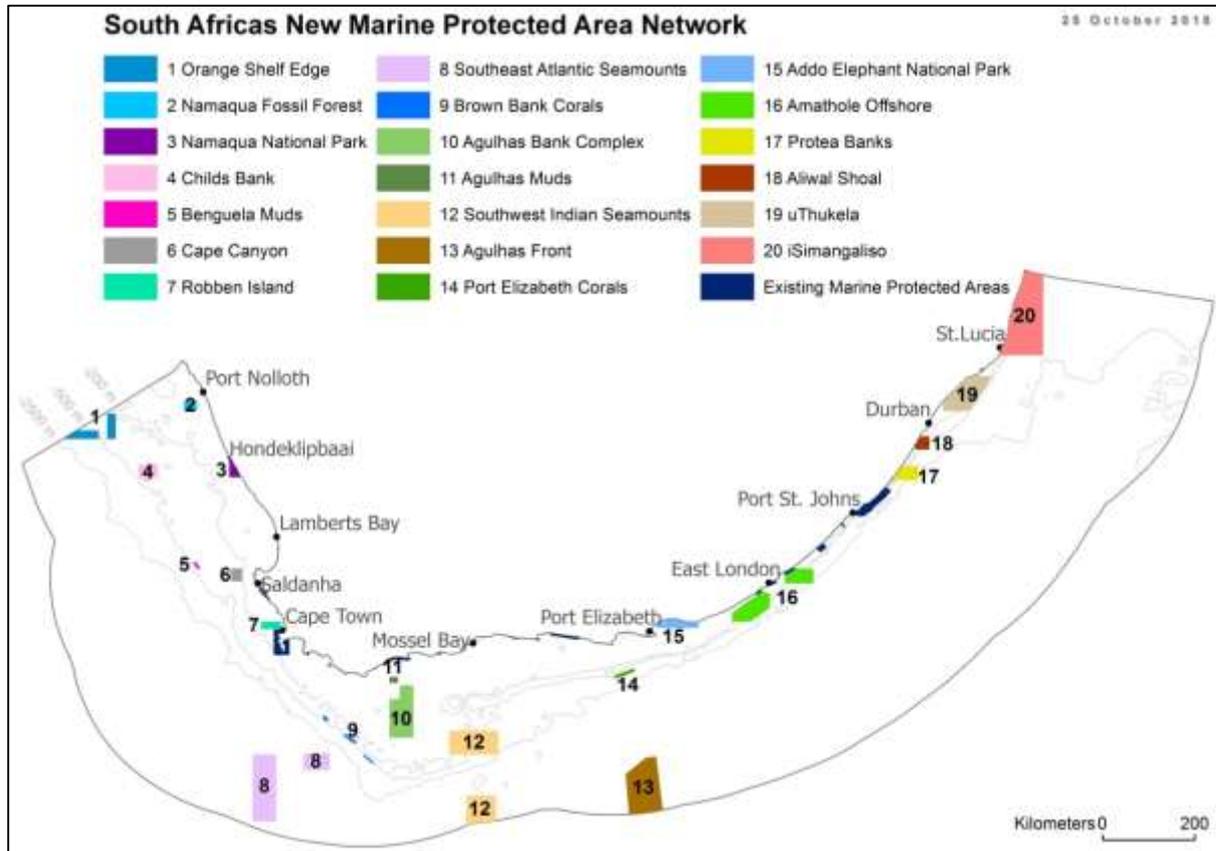


Figure 1: South Africa's 20 new MPAs (adapted from <https://www.saambr.org.za/south-africas-new-marine-protected-areas-looking-back-and-into-the-future/>)