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There is still little empirical evidence on the socio-economic impacts of European Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) on local communities, especially on positive impacts. This is one of the main conclusions of a recent [project we have carried out for DG Mare](#), led by **Rupert Haines** (ICF International) and in partnership with **Caroline Hattam** (Plymouth Marine Laboratory). In the context of this project, IEEP led an [exhaustive literature review](#) exploring the available evidence on socio-economic benefits provided by European MPAs.

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MPAs, we organised a special session at the [Natural Capital Initiative](#) 2019 summit, which was held on

21st and 22nd May in London. The title of our session was *(How) can marine protected areas deliver both conservation and socio-economic benefits? Successful governance strategies and key factors*. Panellists were **Caroline Hattam** and **Rupert Haines** from the study team, and **Robert Clark**, Chief Officer for the **Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority** (IFCA). The following is an extract of the main conclusions of the session.

The **socio-economic benefits of MPAs are rarely monitored and reported in a systematic way**, and our literature review confirmed that there is a significant gap in the knowledge about these impacts in Europe. To complicate further, MPAs across the world vary greatly in terms of governance, management practices and degree of enforcement, which makes it difficult to distinguish any success factors or best practice. Nevertheless, our study identified a number of examples where MPAs have brought benefits to local communities.

During our session, the panellists discussed cases from around the world where MPAs delivered a number of socio-economic benefits to local communities. For instance, Caroline Hattam showed how local communities in the Western Indian Ocean manage marine areas to support both ecology and local livelihoods, and Robert Clark summarised the benefits brought about by the fishery management measures in the Poole Harbour Natura 2000 site (southern England).

Two types of socio-economic benefits of MPAs have been more studied than others. Firstly, **conservation measures can lead to economic benefits to local fisheries**. This was observed e.g. in **Zanzibar, where temporary octopus closures in the village of Kuuu led to a rapid stock recovery and subsequent increased catches and income for local fishermen**. Having witnessed the results of the closures, fishermen grew supportive of the closures and to adopting additional measures such as artificial reefs. Substantial benefits for fishermen were also observed in **Poole Harbour**, where the introduction of a restricted entry permit system in 2015 (together with a reduction of illegal fishing by 95% due to improved enforcement) resulted in a significant increase in targeted stocks. The greater income for fishermen resulted in a shift of attitude in favour of the fishery management measures, which most fishermen now support.

Secondly, **MPAs can stimulate new, or support existing tourism activities**, as observed e.g. in **Mauritius, where voluntary Marine Conservation Areas have created new opportunities for eco-tourism**. Snorkel trails and permanent mooring buoys have been created to facilitate tourist access, some local residents use their boats for tourist trips and local community members have been trained as eco-guides. Our literature review mentioned above also found examples of MPAs benefitting the maritime tourism sector by increasing the number of visitors and generating additional livelihood opportunities for those providing services to tourists (e.g. restaurants, cafés, hotels, guides, organisers of events, etc.).

It was frequently mentioned throughout our Natural Capital Initiative summit session that designation is not enough – **planning, management and enforcement** are essential aspects for MPAs to generate benefits (both ecological and economic). For instance, mechanisms need to be put in place to impose limits to access and to encourage a shift towards more sustainable fishing and tourism practices. Eco-

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compliance. They can also be an effective tool for capacity building and supporting fishermen in the transition to more sustainable practices. Devolution of decision-making power to local level can also help create empowerment, in particular of women.

Our session concluded that **socio-economic benefits generated by MPAs can help build support** from local communities, and that **short-term wins can facilitate support for additional and more comprehensive management measures, if necessary**. The examples discussed showed how this has been achieved in for example Poole Harbour, Zanzibar and Mauritius. A management strategy that actively aims to enable the generation of socio-economic benefits (in addition to ensuring the achievement of conservation objectives) can contribute to reducing opposition to conservation measures and improve compliance, and ultimately also MPA effectiveness.

For more information about IEEP's work on marine policy, please contact [Daniela Russi](#) or [Mia Pantzar](#).

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