

# SA's marine protection increases

The gazetting of a network of 20 new representative Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) has increased South Africa's marine ecosystem area under protection in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).



© Michael Bogner – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

The marine ecosystem area increased from the current 0.4% to 5.4%, to provide protection to 90% of habitat types, as well as contribute to global protection in line with South Africa's international commitments.

The Department of Environmental Affairs said the new network strives to support multiple objectives for biodiversity in alignment with oceans economy goals.

"MPAs provide safe spaces in which fish can breed undisturbed. They are essential to maintain eco-certification of the South African deep-sea trawl fishery.

"This certification process assesses whether habitat and nursery areas for the hake fishery, are adequately protected," the department said on Tuesday in a statement.

MPAs also contribute to growing South Africa's marine eco-tourism sector by providing undisturbed natural habitat for whales, sharks, seals, dolphins, turtles and seabirds for international and domestic tourists to experience.

“An adequate network of MPAs will also provide the basis for ongoing resilience to the impact of climate change. Oceans are an essential component of the climate system, absorbing and transferring heat, and regulating the exchange of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) with the atmosphere.

“With increasing CO<sub>2</sub> levels, and rising ocean temperatures, this regulatory capacity is at risk. The network of MPAs will assist in building ecological resilience, and therefore social and economic resilience in the growing ocean economy,” the department said.

The new MPA network is a product of extensive consultation and negotiation with all stakeholders, which sought to ensure that the network is aligned with relevant policies and priorities for fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, as well as marine mining and oil exploration, while also protecting ecologically important areas.

“The new MPAs represent seamounts, submarine canyons, volcanic pinnacles, and a variety of ecosystem types on the shelf, continental margin, and abyss in both the Indian and Atlantic oceans.

“The new network also provides the first protection for several threatened and fragile ecosystem types, including threatened mud, gravel, and shelf edge habitats and sensitive deep water scleractinian, stylasterine, and soft coral-dominated ecosystem types,” the department said.

This new network of 20 MPAs will, among other things, contribute to fisheries sustainability, advance marine ecotourism, and will help maintain resilience in ecosystems that are under stress from climate change.

“Work on the new approved network of MPAs dates back to 2014, when the South African government endorsed a plan to achieve, as part of Operation Phakisa: Ocean Economy, a viable network of MPAs. South Africa’s ocean space, which is one of the most varied in the world, is highly productive with rich biodiversity providing for living and non-living resources that contribute significantly to the country’s economy and to job creation,” the department said.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>