

# Management of National and Transboundary Marine Protected Areas in Malaysia

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Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have garnered much attention among researchers and marine advocacy groups as a tool for protecting marine habitats, preserving unique marine ecosystems, and fishery management. There is a strong scientific consensus that they increase biodiversity, contribute towards increased abundance of fish, guard against the shortcomings of other management tools and protect against the risk of fishery collapse. Historically, the first MPA in Peninsular Malaysia was the Fisheries Prohibited Area established in the waters 8 kilometres from the island of Redang in 1983. The designation of this area was made under the Fisheries (Prohibited Area) Regulations, 1983 under the then Fisheries Act 1963. Following the lead, subsequently the waters three kilometres off twenty-one islands in the States of Kedah, Terengganu, Pahang and Johor were added to the list. Like Redang, these areas were initially declared as Fisheries Prohibited Areas before being gazetted as Marine Parks in 1994. Since then the waters of 42 islands have been declared as marine parks in Peninsular Malaysia under the Establishment of the Marine Parks Order 1994 under the Fisheries Act 1985. The establishment of these marine parks was made with the goal of creating multiple-use areas for the protection, conservation and management of the marine environment.

In East Malaysia, the first MPA in Sabah was the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, off Kota Kinabalu which was established in 1974. The Turtle Islands Park was established in 1975 and the Pulau Tiga Park was designated as a marine protected area in 1978. The list of marine protected areas in Sabah now includes the Tun Sakaran Marine Park off Samporna and the Tun Mustapha Park off Kudat which was established in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Pulau Sipadan, under the authority of National Security Council is now proposed as an MPA under the management of the Sabah Parks. The principal legislation for the initial establishment of MPAs in Sabah is the Sabah National Parks Ordinance, 1962 which was eventually replaced by the Sabah Parks Enactment, 1984 (amended 2002). The parks in Sabah were established with the aim of conserving the marine biodiversity of its coral reef ecosystems. In addition, park-specific objectives were also



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identified in the East Malaysia's MPAs. For instance, the Pulau Tiga Park was established to protect its unique island ecosystem which includes mud volcanoes, coral reefs and nesting habitat for sea snakes. In comparison, the Turtle Islands were designated to protect the nesting sites for green and hawksbill turtles. On the other hand, Sarawak has three marine parks gazetted under the National Park and Reserve Ordinance. These include the islands of Talang-Talang, Satang-Satang and the most recent submerged marine park known as Miri-Sibuti Marine Park. The first two were gazetted for the turtle conservation, while the latter was for its significant coral reef biodiversity. These models set forth a framework for MPA management that has been shown to enhance fish yields to traditional fishers as well as protect and maintain near-shore coral reef habitats for biodiversity and multiple economic uses.

Besides these national networks of marine parks, there is also a good networking between Malaysia and the Philippines through the establishment of a transboundary MPA in 1996. Known as the Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area (TIHPA), it was the first transboundary MPA primarily for the conservation of marine turtles in the world. The bilateral agreement was produced as a follow-up to recommendations from the First ASEAN Symposium-Workshop on Marine Turtle Conservation in Manila, Philippines (1993).

As such, this paper will focus on experiences gained from the establishment of marine parks in Malaysia from the legal and policy framework, local management implementation, and good practices in national and international MPA networks. This will include marine parks in Peninsular Malaysia and the network created with parks in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak), as well as a case study of the transboundary MPA management, taking TIHPA as an example of international network to assess whether the practices could be used as a benchmark to create other potential transboundary MPA between Malaysia and its neighbouring countries. These assessments would identify the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in order to draw lessons for an improved and effective management system for national and international MPAs networks for Malaysia.