



ORIGIN STORY

Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park and Rapa Nui Multiple Use Marine Protected Area

Published January 2022

Two Large-Scale Marine Protected Areas, One Community: The eastern Pacific ‘goes big’

In the far East of the Pacific Ocean lies a sanctuary for marine life called Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park. Created in 2010, this park bans exploitation of 150,000 square kilometres of ocean and surrounds a tiny, unpeopled island only 0.15 square kilometres in size (Wagner et al. 2021). The island is commonly known as Isla Salas y Gomez but was first named Motu Motiro Hiva by the indigenous people of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) to whom the island is important both culturally and as a traditional source of fish (Gaymer et al, 2014). In 2018 a second, even larger marine protected area was established encompassing both Motu Motiro Hiva and Rapa Nui: the Rapa Nui Multiple Use Marine Protected Area, measuring an enormous 740,000 square kilometres (Marley 2018). These protections, however, did not come easily.

The inspiration for protecting a wide stretch of ocean in Chilean waters arrived in January 2008 at the World Economic Forum, where celebrated conservationist Enric Sala was receiving the Young Global Leader Award (World Economic Forum). Sala had recently become a National Geographic Fellow and developed the Pristine Seas initiative, a project to explore, document and protect the “last wild places” in the ocean (World Economic Forum). During the event, Sala met with then-Chilean Presidential candidate Sebastián Piñera (Eilperin 2011). As the two talked about their mutual experiences scuba diving near Motu Motiro Hiva, Sala mentioned his interest in eventually protecting the waters around the island (Eilperin 2011). While scientific data on the area was fragmented and mostly available outside of the Chilean EEZ due to several foreign expeditions, there was enough to suspect that Salas y Gomez was a valuable center of biodiversity (Gálvez-Larach, 2009). Establishing a protected area in the region was also considered a priority due to “the imminent establishment of a South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization” which would control fishing in the area (Gálvez 2008; Gálvez-Larach 2009).

In 2009, Sala and National Geographic developed a plan with ocean-focused NGO Oceana and the Waitt Foundation for an expedition to collect more detailed information about the natural riches of Motu Motiro Hiva (National Geographic). Soon a vessel was secured, and an expedition was scheduled for February 2010 (National Geographic). After the ship had departed on its mission to Motu Motiro Hiva, however, tragedy struck when the 2010 Chile earthquake and tsunami rocked the region (Oceana 2011). While most of the expedition was cancelled, participants from the Waitt Institute, Oceana, Universidad Católica del Norte (UCN) and the Orca Diving Center on Rapa Nui were able to conduct some research using SCUBA and an ROV to identify sites of interest for future studies (Oceana 2011). Their investigation justified Sala’s excitement: The ocean surrounding Motu Motiro Hiva featured abundant populations of sharks and lobsters, along with unusually high biodiversity in deeper waters (Hoffens Wenzel, 2010).

Using data and photographs from the miniature expedition, Oceana and National Geographic submitted an official proposal for a marine park protecting the entire 411,717 square km of Motu Motiro Hiva’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to the Chilean government (Hoffens Wenzel, 2010; Oceana 2011). Their proposal was supported by the Fisheries Commission of the Chilean Senate (Hoffens Wenzel, 2010).

Planning for conservation also included meetings with members of Chile's industrial fishing industry, which had opposed protections in other regions of Chile's EEZ in the past but did not fish in Rapa Nui's waters (Wei-Haas 2018; Zyllich 2014). The initiative to protect Motu Motiro Hiva found an extra source of support in Sebastian Piñera, now President, who Enric Sala had met at the World Economic Forum two years before (Young 2014; Eilperin 2011). Desiring a legacy to commemorate Chile's bicentennial celebrations (Gaymer, 2021), Piñera issued a directive to the Undersecretariat for Fisheries and Aquaculture requesting a technical report to support the case for an MPA in the region (Chilean Undersecretariat of Fisheries 2010). That report declared that a full scientific expedition would be mounted in 2011 to inventory existing species and monitor the future park's conservation status (Chilean Undersecretariat of Fisheries 2010). Following these meetings and a consultation with a government representative on Rapa Nui, President Piñera announced the establishment of a 150,000 square km marine park around Motu Motiro Hiva on October 6th, 2010 (Hoffens Wenzel, 2010).

The 2010 declaration of the marine park by the Chilean government was not universally applauded, however. The lack of consultation with indigenous people in the lead-up to its creation sparked frustration among the people of the nearby island of Rapa Nui, who viewed the area now restricted by the Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park as important to their culture and resources (Gaymer et al., 2014). Nonetheless, research in the new park continued. The scientific expedition recommended by the Undersecretariat for Fisheries and Aquaculture was run in February-March 2011 with the support of Oceana, National Geographic, and the Chilean Navy (Oceana 2011). Its expedition's results provided baselines for implementation of the MPA and showed just how special the marine ecosystems around Motu Motiro Hiva were: Endemic and regionally endemic species comprised 73% of fish abundance near the island due to the region's extreme remoteness (Friedlander 2013).

The expedition also compared the wildlife of Motu Motiro Hiva with that of Rapa Nui, producing interesting conclusions. While both islands and the seamounts between them featured similar levels of endemism and diversity, fish biomass at Motu Motiro Hiva was 2.6 times greater than at Rapa Nui. Apex predators, meanwhile, made up 43% of the fish biomass at Motu Motiro Hiva but only 2% at Rapa Nui (Friedlander 2013). These findings spurred Oceana and National Geographic to call on President Piñera to support an expansion of Motu Motiro Hiva Marine Park (FishUpdate 2011). Oceana and fellow NGO The Pew Charitable Trusts also offered suggestions for "a large-scale fully no-take marine protected area around Rapa Nui" (Aburto et al., 2020).

As this process unfolded, discussions about the value of MPAs were occurring on Rapa Nui itself. While the Rapanui had observed a dramatic decline in their fishing returns over the past three decades, a shift that many attributed to illegal international fishing vessels lining the horizon, the atmosphere of mistrust created by the MMHMP led to stiff resistance to any further MPAs proposed by the government or other outside actors (Gaymer et al., 2014; Aburto et al., 2020).

Over the next several years, however, local support for some form of protection strengthened (Aburto et al., 2020). Universities, research centers, government agencies, and NGOs conducted capacity-building events on the island, training "thousands of Rapanui people in various marine issues (including legislation, management, fisheries and conservation)" (Paredes et al., 2019). The first local marine conservation organization on Rapa Nui, Tapu Indigenous Community, was established in 2012 (Aburto et al., 2020). In 2014, IUCN and a representative from the Locally Managed Marine Areas network (LMMMA) worked with Tapu to hold a series of meetings discussing how indigenous groups in Melanesia and Polynesia were empowered to establish and manage their own community-based coastal MPAs (Aburto et al.). Several

visits to Rapa Nui were also made by representatives of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in Hawaii and the Te Tai Nui A Hau MPA in Marquesas (Gaymer and Friedlander 2021).

In the wake of these events, some Rapanui were inspired to convene a local marine town meeting referred to as Cabildo del Mar in September 2014 to discuss what could be done to reverse the decline in their own marine resources (Aburto et al, 2020). A working group of Rapanui called Mesa post Cabildo (Te Mau o te Vaikava) was also established to move the work of the Cabildo del Mar forward (Aburto et al, 2020).

Opinions of what an MPA around Rapa Nui should look like were not unanimous. A relatively small but active and well-funded group of Rapanui “attempted to impose a fully no-take LSMPA” while a less-organized, fishermen-based majority group supported a multiple-use Marine Protected Area (MUMPA) to allow for continued fishing in the MPA by indigenous people (Paredes et al., 2019). The minority in support of a no-take MPA gradually took control of the Mesa post Cabildo working group as other stakeholders left, driving a wedge between the goals of Mesa post Cabildo and public opinion (Aburto et al, 2020).

Because of this broken line of communication, the majority of Rapanui were surprised and angry when, at the 2015 Our Oceans Conference, the Government of Chile announced its commitment to a second MPA including the EEZs of both Rapa Nui and Motu Motiro Hiva (Aburto et al., 2020). In June 2016, Chilean government representatives held a meeting in Rapa Nui and realized that, despite the work of Mesa post Cabildo “no consensus existed for the creation of a marine park” (Aburto et al., 2020) As a result, the process set in motion at the Our Oceans Conference came to a halt.

After meeting with local organizations, the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs came to understand that most Rapanui groups favored a MUMPA “that would allow traditional fishing by the Rapanui people while protecting them from industrial fisheries” (Aburto et al., 2020). That proposal was taken up by the Chilean government and CODEIPA, the elected organization on Rapa Nui that is authorized to “negotiate any island issue with the Chilean State” (Aburto et al., 2020). With the agreement of both parties, a consultation process began on Rapa Nui involving participatory planning, informing the community, Rapanui intra-familiar discussion, and continued dialogue with the Chilean Government (Aburto et al., 2020). Once the process was complete, the people of Rapa Nui were asked to respond to a referendum with three questions:

1. Do you agree with creating a MUMPA that recognizes and secures the resources for the Rapanui people and the co-administration and management with the Chilean government? (Aburto et al., 2020).
2. Do you agree that co-administration and management is carried out by 6 representatives of the Rapanui people and 5 from the State? (Ibid.).
3. Do you agree that fishing is restricted to Rapanui artisanal gears and methods? (Ibid.).

The results of this referendum were announced in September of 2017 during the Fourth International MPA Congress (Aburto et al., 2020). In the end, public response to the questions was mostly positive: 62 percent of Rapanui supported the creation of a co-managed, multiple-use MPA, 59 percent supported a management council made up of six Rapanui and five Chilean state representatives, and 74 percent agreed that fishing should be restricted to Rapanui artisanal gears and methods (Aburto et al, 2020). Pleased by the results, a representative of CODEIPA stated that “the sea of Rapa Nui has won, the Rapanui people have won, Chile nationally and internationally has won” (Aburto et al., 2020). Having overcome its

initial struggles, the Rapa Nui Multiple-Use Marine Protected Area was officially designated throughout the entirety of Rapa Nui's and Motu Motiro Hiva's EEZs on February 27th, 2018 (Wei-Haas, 2018).

REFERENCES

Aburto, J.A., Gaymer, C.F., Govan, H. 2020. "A large-scale Marine Protected Area for the Sea of Rapa Nui: From Ocean Grabbing to Legitimacy." *Ocean and Coastal Management* 198 105327

Chilean Undersecretariat of Fisheries. 2010. "Technical Report (R.PESQ.) [N ° 81/2010: Fundamentals to establish the Salas y Gómez Marine Park](http://transparencia.economia.cl/documentos/RPESQ%20081-2010%20Fundamentos%20para%20Establecer%20AMP%20en%20Salas%20y%20Gomez.pdf)" <http://transparencia.economia.cl/documentos/RPESQ%20081-2010%20Fundamentos%20para%20Establecer%20AMP%20en%20Salas%20y%20Gomez.pdf>

Eilperin, Juliet. 2011. "National Geographic's Enric Sala is a Man on a Mission." *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/national-geographics-enric-sala-is-a-man-on-a-mission/2011/08/11/gIQAIsMOZJ_story.html

FishUpdate. 2011. "Scientific Report Recommends Extension of Marine Park around Salas y Gomez Island." <https://www.fishfarmermagazine.com/archive-2/scientific-report-recommends-extension-of-marine-park-around-salas-y-gomez-island-fishupdate-com/>

Friedlander, Alan, Enric Ballesteros, Jim Beets, Eric Berkenpas, Carlos Gaymer, Matthias Gorny, and Enric Sala. 2013. "Effects of Isolation and Fishing on the Marine Ecosystems of Easter Island and Salas y Gómez, Chile." *Aquatic Conservation Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems* 23 (August): 23:515-531. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.2333>.

Gálvez, M. 2008. Seamounts of Nazca and Salas-Y-Gómez: A Review for Management and Conservation Purposes. Deep Sea Coral Symposium– the World's Premier Deep Sea Coral Event, 4th ISDSC, 1-5 December, 2008, Wellington, New Zealand.

Gálvez-Larach, M. 2009. Montes submarinos de Nazca y Salas y Gómez: una revisión para el manejo y conservación. *Lat. Am. J. Aquat. Res.*, 37(3): 479-500

Gaymer, C., Stadel, A.V., Ban, N.C., C´arcamo, P., Ierna, J., Lieberknecht, L.M., 2014. Merging top-down and bottom-up approaches in marine protected areas planning: experiences from around the globe. *Aquat. Conserv. Mar. Freshw. Ecosyst.* 24, 128-144.

Gaymer, Carlos F., and Friedlander, Alan M. 2011. "Using Traditional Ecological Knowledge to Inform the Management of Chile's Large Marine Protected Areas." *National Geographic*. <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2021/06/11/using-traditional-ecological-knowledge-to-inform-the-management-of-chiles-large-marine-protected-areas/>

Gaymer, Carlos. 2021. Associate Professor, Marine Biology Department, Universidad Catolica del Norte (UCN), Personal communication with the author. August 2021

Hoffens Wenzel, A. 2010. The Creation of a Marine Park in Isla Sala Y Gomez is valued. OCEANA. https://web.archive.org/web/20101012050815/http://oceana.org/america-del-sur/prensa/comunicados-de-prensa/press_release/0/1261

Marley, J., 2018. "Easter Island Votes for the World's Newest Marine Reserve." Mongabay. <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/02/easter-island-votes-for-worlds-newest-marine-reserve/>

National Geographic. "Sala y Gomez and Easter Island." <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/pristine-seas/expeditions/sala-y-gomez-easter-island/>

Oceana 2011. "The Sea Birds Oasis" <https://chilebajoelmar.oceana.org/en/expeditions/isla-salas-y-gomez/>

Paredes, F., Flores, D., Figueroa, A., Gaymer, C.F., Aburto, J.A., 2019. Science, capacity building and conservation knowledge: the empowerment of the local community for marine conservation in Rapa Nui. *Aquatic Conservation. Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*.

Wagner, Daniel, Liesbeth van der Meer, Matthias Gorny, Javier Sellanes, Carlos F. Gaymer, Eulogio H. Soto, Erin E. Easton, et al. 2021. "The Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges: A Review of the Importance, Opportunities and Challenges for Protecting a Global Diversity Hotspot on the High Seas." *Marine Policy* 126 (April): 104377. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104377>.

Wei-Haas, Maya. 2018. "Chile Announces Protections for Massive Swath of Ocean with Three New Marine Parks." *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/chile-protects-massive-swath-ocean-new-marine-parks-180968275/>

World Economic Forum. "Enric Sala." <https://www.weforum.org/people/enric-sala>

Young, Forrest Wade. 2014. "Rapa Nui." *The Contemporary Pacific* 26:1, University of Hawaii Press.

Zylich, Kyrstn, Sarah Harper, Roberto Licandeo, Rodrigo Vega, Dirk Zeller, and Daniel Pauly. 2014. "Fishing in Easter Island, a Recent History (1950 2010)." *Latin American Journal of Aquatic Research* 42 (4): 845–56. https://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S0718-560X2014000400011&lng=pt&nrm=iso&tlng=en