



Protecting Blue Horizons

The industrial fisher / captain

One possible scenario: Along the western coast of an island in a temperate sea, a species rich ecosystem needs urgent protection. As a result, also the octopus population, a commercially important species for the local fishers can recover. Overfishing, particularly from destructive bottom trawling, pollution and invasive species, strain the ecosystems. In order to protect fish and octopus nursery areas and allow the juvenile individuals to grow, a Marine Protected Area (MPA) is being planned.

NB Another scenario can be chosen for all to fit your context better, applicable to all. See fictional map or use a map of a coastal area close by to help visualise the conflict areas between different interests.

MPAs are geographically distinct zones which aim at safeguarding the biodiversity through habitat protection, maintaining marine ecosystem healthy or restore them to a healthy state for the supply of ecosystem products and services. They are fundamental because they help to release the pressure on the habitats and on the species. Indeed, many human activities and all the phenomena linked to the climate change put a huge pressure on ecosystems.

Imagine you are the proud owner captain of an industrial trawler. Fishing has been declining in the last few years despite investment into modern equipment and expanding trips. The economics of your business could be better, so occasionally you trawl at night closer to shore than you normally should, in the three miles coastal waters reserved to artisanal fishers. You have also occasionally fished pelagic species for the tuna farms around nearby Malta. Some of your colleagues further north have already given up because high fish prices were not enough to compensate for high fuel costs and diminishing catches.

The lobbyists of EUROPECHE (or another relevant lobby organisation outside Europe as applicable) strengthen your resolve to argue for more industrial fishing and fresh subsidies together with higher prices to compensate the fact that European catches have shrunk from about 5 million tons in 2018 to 3.4 million tons in 2022. You resent the massive imports from outside the EU at cheaper prices (modify as appropriate). You are also no friend of the marine conservationists who are pushing for more restrictions and wrongly blame bottom trawling for excessive CO₂ emissions and disturbance of the sea floor, while you think it is such an efficient catching method which does a bit of plowing just as a tractor on land. You are not impressed with the social scientists either, who exaggerate the social problems of less efficient groups and do not recognize the hard work of industrial fishers.

You are a proud fisher, but feel misunderstood by many. You are a little concerned though that your son does not want to be fisher like you. If you could refit your vessel perhaps with octopus pots, a high value species, and save on fuel, perhaps you could improve the profitability and thus also convince your son that his future could be at sea. Didn't his son say that with dwindling fish resources there would be no good fishing going forward? But the sea had always provided for him. It could not be exhausted and all the talk about MPAs is complicating your life further beyond all the rules and controls you are subjected to. But the exclusion zones around marine wind parks would be even worse.