



Protecting Blue Horizons

The artisanal fisher woman

One possible scenario: Along the western coast of an island in a temperate sea, 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 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 being an artisanal fisher woman living and working in this coastal region. For you, the sea means a lot in your culture. Your livelihood of mostly land-based activities connected to fishing is closely connected to the sea and you know that your own future and that of all professions in artisanal fishing depend on a healthy ocean and its inhabitants. Mending nets, preparing the fishing tours of the men in your family, sometimes going out yourself, making sure landed fish is of excellent quality and gets marketed at a fair price directly to consumers or restaurants is your business. It is not just an **economic activity**, it is part of your **culture**.

When the men were complaining among themselves how **industrial overfishing**, marine pollution, and climate change were reducing their income, but did not take initiatives to counter the negative trend, **you consulted** with other women, with tourists, with restaurant owners and anybody who could provide you with knowledge not available among village inhabitants to explore new sources of income. Coastal constructions bringing space competition can be locally also very important. You did not accept playing second fiddle in a male dominated world. You attended conferences and the Small-Scale Fisheries Summit at the FAO in Rome to demand more recognition for women in fisheries in the legal and social system. You also found ways to add value to the fish landed by your family and stabilize income.

You consider conservation and restoration measures such as Marine Protected Areas essential to ensure the future of small-scale fisheries, not only to extract high quality fish but also as guardian of the environment and a 'teacher' to connect urbanites to the ocean again in order to ensure the ocean and its creatures are respected.

You ask for **consultation** and **participation in planning and decision-making** because the establishment of the MPA and the way it will be managed affects you and women like yourself very directly. In the same vein, you demand recognition of your work and status. That entails also equitable access to social services in your own right (not only through family members), such as education, health care and pension.

You will explain that you are the fifth generation of artisanal fisher woman and that it is in your best interest to protect an ecologically important area. However, costs and benefits must be fairly apportioned and your social and economic existence safeguarded.