
APPENDIX B: SISTER SANCTUARY PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) supports “Sister Sanctuary” relationships with other countries. Sister sanctuaries are formal agreements between individual national marine sanctuaries and marine protected areas in other countries to share experiences and expertise.

PROGRAM AUTHORITY

Section 305(c) of the National Marine Sanctuary Act directs the Secretary of Commerce to cooperate with other governments and international organizations in furtherance of the NMSA for the protection and management of special marine areas. Sister sanctuaries can play an important role in international efforts to protect and manage special marine areas.

LINKAGES WITH THE NMSP STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal 6 of the NMSP Strategic Plan summarizes the NMSP’s role in international activities. The NMSP works “with the international community to strengthen global protection of marine resources, investigate and employ appropriate new management approaches, and disseminate NMSP experience and techniques.” Specifically, objective 1 of goal 6 reads: “Develop multilateral program relationships to interact with, share knowledge and experience with, and learn from international partners to improve the NMSP’s management capacity, and bring new experiences to marine protected area management in the U.S.” Clearly establishing sister sanctuary relationships around the world will further this goal.

ESTABLISHING SISTER SANCTUARY RELATIONSHIPS

The criteria for establishing a sister sanctuaries are:

- (1) Both sites should have shared or similar resources (cultural and/or natural) or policy or management challenges.
- (2) The sites should be able to communicate regularly without unbreachable impediments though various modes of technology and/or personnel exchanges as appropriate and supportable.
- (3) The sites should both be able to commit resources to support a stable, long-term relationship.

IMPLEMENTING SISTER SANCTUARY RELATIONSHIPS

Sister sanctuary status provides the opportunity for sanctuary field and headquarters staff to interact with leadership and staff at marine protected areas around the world on a formal basis. Opportunities for interaction include: information sharing through electronic communication, site visits, training and personnel exchanges. The scope of the relationship will vary from site to site depending on the needs of the partners. Sister sanctuary relationships must be established through a formal agreement, such as a Memorandum of Agreement.

The history of sister sanctuary partnerships has been limited, but include two ongoing initiatives.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary has a sister sanctuary – the Sanya Coral Reef Nature Reserve in China. The stated purpose of the agreement is the transfer of knowledge to further the understanding of complex coastal ecosystems and their protection through research, monitoring, education, and stewardship.

The Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) and the Sanctuario de los Mamiferos Marinos (Navidad y Bahia de Samana) of the Dominican Republic are establishing a sister sanctuary relationship to further research, monitoring, and education involving humpback whales and the respective marine bank ecosystems which they frequent. The agreement between the two entities is being developed.

Additional sister sanctuary arrangements will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The NMSP International Task Force will consider strategic partnerships developed through sister sanctuary status.