

# **Marine conservation in remote small island settings: Factors influencing marine protected area establishment in the Azores**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) in remote small island settings with specific reference to the Portuguese island of Corvo in the Azores. This case study represents different approaches to marine conservation, ranging from an informal community-based no-take MPA to a government-driven multi-purpose natural park, involving diverse local and external actors interacting over an extended period of time. In-depth interviews were used to explore the perceptions of local and expert stakeholders about positive and negative aspects of MPA establishment. This demonstrated how differing approaches have led to varying degrees of MPA effectiveness. From the community-based MPA, several key ingredients for effective MPA establishment were identified, including engaging and empowering local communities, clear definition of goals, visible MPA outputs and community enforcement based on high levels of support and peer group pressure. However, in a context of complex marine resource use, the limitations of community-based initiatives prevent them from achieving broad ecosystem conservation goals. These might be better achieved through government-driven MPAs, provided that they are integrated in a wider regional marine strategy and that there is political will to effectively implement conservation measures and to allocate resources for management, enforcement and monitoring.