COSTA RICA

Seamounts Marine Management Area
Location and area

The Seamounts Marine Management Area, also known as Las Gemelas, is located in Costa Rica’s Pacific Ocean. It surrounds Coco Island National Park's 1,989 km² of existing Marine Protected Area (MPA), which is a no-take zone and World Heritage site.

The new protected area “will help set clear parameters to defend one of the greatest zones of marine wealth in the Planet: Coco Island.”
Laura Chinchilla, President of Costa Rica

The new conservation area encompasses 9,640 km², which represent 1.6% of Costa Rica’s jurisdictional waters. It adds this extension to Coco MPA, for a total coverage of 11,629 km², becoming the largest marine protected region in the country, second in the whole Eastern Tropical Pacific, after Galápagos in Ecuador.

History

On March 2010, multisectoral participatory workshops, led by conservation, tourism and fishing industry representatives, took place to propose a management scheme for this new protected site.

The selected category was “Marine Management Area”, which regulates tourism, sport fishing, commercial fishing, and scientific research, as determined by a management plan. Trawling nets, purse-seining, and oil exploration and exploitation are excluded.

On March 2nd, 2011, President Laura Chinchilla declared the new Seamounts Marine Management Area, as a pioneering effort of stewardship of the Costa Rican oceans.
The greatest challenge to protect our biodiversity is posed by our oceans…
The task goes farther beyond our strength as a small nation. Therefore, this decree raises a voice to the international community, a gesture that calls out to the responsibility of countries with more technical and material resources, which we trust will understand the need to be supportive with this effort, since our inactivity and indifference will be payed by us all.”

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Context
Costa Rica’s oceans are eleven times larger than its terrestrial area. Before the creation of the Seamounts Marine Management Area, only 0.79% of the country’s jurisdictional waters was safeguarded by conservation measures, all within territorial waters.

This new protected site becomes the only oceanic conservation area in the country. Furthermore, it triples Costa Rica’s MPA coverage.

Biological relevance
The Seamounts Marine Management Area works as a buffer zone around the Coco Island National Park. It protects important migratory species such as tuna, dolphin and hammer sharks traveling along the Eastern Tropical Pacific, as well as over 30 endemic fishes and 30 coral species.

The density of invertebrates at the Seamounts is larger than at nearby Coco Island, including groups such as glass sponges, octocorals, black and stony corals, and calcified hydroids.

The site’s rich biodiversity has attracted intense fishing activity from international fleets to supply the global market. The absence of management strategies and enforcement has endangered its survival.

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MarViva Foundation is a regional, non-governmental, non-profit organization whose area of action is based on selected areas of the Eastern Tropical Pacific. MarViva’s mission is to encourage the conservation and sustainable use of coastal and marine resources through Marine Spatial Planning processes by means of:

- Creating opportunities to discuss, harmonize, and improve regulations and standards regarding the human activities in the sea.
- Providing technical and scientific support to governments, communities, businesses and other decision makers for the formulation of policy and sustainable development activities.
- Strengthening community participation in decision making processes.
- Supporting Marine Protected Areas (MPA’s) management and control.
- Raising awareness and calling to action via social communication tools.

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