



After the Fact | [Ocean People Planet: Cultivating Conservation](#)

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TRANSCRIPT

[cold open]

Ludovic Burns Tuki: De ahí nosotros venimos. De ahí nosotros vivimos.

[sounds of waves on shore]

Dan LeDuc, host: Welcome back to “After the Fact” and our series, “Ocean, People, Planet.” For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I’m Dan LeDuc. And that was Ludovic Burns Tuki, a community leader on Easter Island in the South Pacific. He was saying, “We came from the sea. We live from the sea.”

The Rapa Nui people have long lived in harmony with the waters surrounding their island home. They are among the more than 680 million people, according to the United Nations, who live in low-lying coastal zones, or regions that are less than 10 meters above sea level. Of these 680 million people, which is our data point for this episode, many rely on the ocean for their livelihoods, their food, and their cultural identities.

While everyone on the planet has a stake in the future of the ocean, those living closest have perhaps a greater interest—and perhaps are best positioned to lead conservation efforts to replenish and sustain an ocean that has been overfished, polluted, and warmed up by climate change.

One way to do that is through marine protected areas or MPAs, which is what we’re talking about today.

Dan LeDuc: Well, Johnny Briggs, welcome. You're speaking to us from London. Tell us what you do there.

Johnny Briggs, senior officer, Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy Project: Hi, Dan, delighted to be here. I work for the Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy Project, which is a partnership between Pew and Donna Bertarelli. The job is to protect the ocean.



Dan LeDuc: That partnership focuses on creation of marine protected areas. What are they and what do they do?

Johnny Briggs: Marine protected areas are national parks in the ocean is a good way to think about them. It's a defined space with boundaries within which human impacts are restricted. So, if you think about it, it might be an area where fishing is restricted, or oil and gas activities, and the idea is that if you do this, it will protect nature and help it to flourish. It's not a new idea; for centuries in Oceania, we've had local communities protecting the ocean in order to sustain their fisheries.

Dan LeDuc: You mentioned Indigenous populations over centuries have been creative and smart enough to recognize when a certain species is starting to decline and, for the sake of their communities, would say, "OK, well, hold off there." So it's an ancient thing that we're trying to now modernize in some ways, I guess.

Johnny Briggs: What's happened more recently, I think, is a better understanding of how MPAs can really deliver the best outcomes. There's 18,000 marine protected areas recorded in the global database. But if you take the top 100 of those by area, that is 86% of the whole area. If we look at some of the areas I work, like the Pitcairn Islands, these waters are 3 1/2 times the size of the United Kingdom, and these are protected.

If you fully protect an area, there'll be healthier and bigger fish that then produce more larvae, which then spill over to the localized seas next door, which can then be fished. So, there can be lots and lots of benefits, but it's really crucial that any marine conservation initiative should always benefit a local community, and it should never be detrimental to people's way of life. And to do that, you really need full engagement from the outset and then full involvement and implementation.

Dan LeDuc: So, there are different types of MPAs, right?

Johnny Briggs: If you ask 100 people what is a marine protected area who even work in this space, they might give you 100 different answers. Recently, a paper which came out in the journal *Science* sought to add clarity to this. And what they did was they classified marine protected areas by level of protection.

So they said at the one end of the scale, you have fully protected areas, where, as I said, you've got no extractive activity at all, so it's "no take." It's left alone. And at the bottom end of the scale, you've got minimally protected, and in these waters you can have sustainable fisheries, for example, operating throughout the MPA. There could be a lot of tourist activity.



There are red lines underpinning all of these: You shouldn't have any damaging industrial activities happening in any level of protected area, no damaging industrial fishing, no oil and gas, no deep-sea mining, these kinds of things.

The first generation really was these big marine parks, but now the logic and the thinking has really evolved to really think of a whole ocean approach.

A country has 200 nautical miles beyond its landmass under its jurisdiction. So, if you think of a whale shark moving from Galápagos to Costa Rica from marine protected areas, if there's unsustainable and dangerous fishing practices in between, which might ensnare them in nets, you're undermining the protection that your MPAs deliver.

The ocean is one big, interconnected ecosystem. You need these big marine protected areas, but also you need to think about the areas in between the MPAs.

[music plays]

A story that quite a lot people might know but might not put two and two together: the ship called the Bounty in 1790, which was in Tahiti. A few of the people on board hatched a plan. They thought, we don't really actually want to go back to the U.K., so they, possibly by nefarious means, got some Tahitian women on board the vessel and took the ship. Half of them mutinied, kicked off Captain Bligh and a few others, and sent them packing in a little boat.

But the mutineers and the Tahitian women then ended up on this small island and they chose it because it was the wrong place on a map. And they thought, well, we're never going to get found here. We can set up our new community, which ultimately was called Pitcairn. The people there now are eighth generation of the mutineers.

And Pitcairn is this archipelago in the middle of the Pacific of four tiny islands. It has a marine area 3 1/2 times the size of the U.K. So, you've got this isolated community of 45 people with the ability to protect this huge swath of ocean, and they've done that. And they've done that because they realize that a healthy and sustainable ocean is crucial to their way of life.

Dan LeDuc: The mutiny begat one of the world's largest marine protected areas. Another recently established MPA has a similarly fascinating history: The Rapa Nui Marine Protected Area is off the coast of Easter Island, where Ludovic Burns Tuki lives. While the MPA was created in 2018, people have lived on the island for millennia and created the



striking Moai statues there. As you'll hear from Ludovic, the ocean is central to his culture and community's way of life.

[English voiceover with original Spanish in background]

Ludovic Burns Tuki, Easter Island community leader: We come from the sea. We live from the sea.

So, everyone knows it as Rapa Nui, the bellybutton of the world, Easter Island. It is the most isolated island in the world, in the middle of the Pacific, where the closest land is 2,000 kilometers away.

This triangle that we call the Polynesian Triangle has this relationship with the *heke*, the octopus. At the center, there is an island that is called *Raiatea*. There is a platform on this island called Marae Taputapuatea. And this platform represents the head of the octopus. And the different arms represent the different sailing paths.

This is where the relationship with the sea comes from. And one of these arms reached the island. The original name of the island is Te Pito Te Henua, the bellybutton of the world. Why the bellybutton? Not because we are the best, or the center. Simply because the last connection between mother and child is the bellybutton.

So, everything has an eternal connection with the family. And the intermediary is, of course, the sea, the ocean.

Dan LeDuc: Known as La Mesa del Mar, the community formed a council to represent the needs and views of the Rapa Nui, working closely with global partners to include traditional knowledge as part of the science underpinning the creation of a new marine protected area surrounding Easter Island.

Ludovic Burns Tuki: La Mesa del Mar was a council born from a group of people that had awareness, a surfer's point of view, a tourist's point of view. They all got together. "We're going to talk. We're going to make a council of the sea." There were 322 people. From there, La Mesa del Mar was born.

I'm ready to confront anything with my community, because if it tells me that I am selling the sea, I'll ask myself, I don't want to be responsible in the future about anything that is going to happen in the island because of not wanting to take care of it.



Thanks to La Mesa del Mar, today we are talking about the ocean. We are talking about protection. We are making direct progress for the community to express itself about what it wants to protect.

In reality we are all connected. Because all of our lives are based on the current.

We are working on protection, but it must be a protection that's connected because, sometimes, it doesn't work at all to protect here, if on the other side they're doing something else, and we are on the receiving end. You have to have a vision of the big picture.

Dan LeDuc: The Rapa Nui MPA shows that it's possible for island and coastal communities to play an important role in conserving the ocean and their cultural heritage. Johnny Briggs says that's not only possible, but essential.

Johnny Briggs: There should be really two overarching deliverables to an MPA: to protect the ecosystem, the ocean ecosystem, and also to really bring benefits to local people. If any conservation measure is detrimental to the local people, that is negative and shouldn't take place. And the longevity of those protections depend on the local people gaining positively from the conservation measure in place.

These sort of positive impacts might include sustenance. If an area is protected, that might increase the productivity, so more opportunity to catch fish. The ability to maintain cultural heritage is amplified by protecting that ocean environment. And in the long term as well, if an MPA is implemented, you could have a boost to the economy through the blue economy, and also actual job creation, ownership of this.

In Pitcairn, there's an MPA officer who works there, managing the protected area, who's a local person. There are local people who contribute to whale watching. Humpback whales are returning and calving there, and all the local community contribute to counting those whales. The fact there's an MPA has brought inward investment in. A new science center is now being built to try to enhance collaboration with scientists from around the world. Dialogue is crucial to ensure that the benefits are as significant as possible.

Dan LeDuc: How are MPAs formed with local communities? How do you work with them?

Johnny Briggs: Tristan da Cunha, which is an island in the middle of the Atlantic, which claims to be the most isolated island community on the planet. Being so isolated, the community was anxious to ensure that even if they enhance protections, they still have



the ability to extract from the ocean in order to sustain their economy, their livelihoods. So here, you have a real process of exploring which areas should be protected. So, scientists will be commissioned to map where the key habitats are, where the key species are moving, how climate change might impact these over time, and then to really evaluate the economics of the fisheries, what works, what the right balance might be. And in the end, there's a lobster fishery which brings in 80% of the Tristan da Cunha economy. So, this is shielded from enhanced protections. This fishery is maintained. And what they call the "marine protection zone" was designated in their waters: a huge fully protected area which protects migratory routes of tuna and all sorts of really exciting species. It was community-led. It was designed the way that the community wanted it to be.

The discussion came in also, if anything ever happened to our lobster fishery, how do we then cover ourselves economically? That's when outside donors, philanthropy, NGOs get creative, and an endowment fund was actually set up. So the interest on that is returned to the community in perpetuity to pay for conservation projects, management of the marine environment. And it all kind of works together like that.

Dan LeDuc: How do you start bringing all of these varied interests together? You mentioned if there's nothing going on somewhere it's easy to protect a big place. But in more and more of the ocean, commercial fishing is an enormous industry heavily subsidized by many governments. How do you start reducing that, changing behaviors, and bringing these disparate interests together?

Johnny Briggs: Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy is science-led, so you want to undertake as much research as you possibly can.

What is the biodiversity? Where does it live? Where does it move throughout the year? What are the pressures which it is under? How does the local economy depend on the ocean and how would different levels of protection and designs of MPAs impact that?

You have to make sure that all these questions are being considered from the outset, but at all times engaging as much as possible with the core groups. And as I said, it has to be local-led. If there's not local ownership, then the ability of these protections to withstand over time are seriously diminished. Local people have to be fully on the side supporting the implementation of these areas. These have typically been areas in very isolated parts of the ocean, which are rich in biodiversity, which really have little existing commercial activity. And what that means is that these areas really need to be protected, but also that it's feasible to achieve that protection.



Dan LeDuc: How does that actually happen? Who determines where an MPA goes? Is it in some cases the governments, but if you're beyond an economic zone, is there something for the great seas that can also weigh in and help us figure all these things out? What are the authorities that determine these places?

Johnny Briggs: So, you've got sectors, you've got Indigenous and local peoples, you've got governments. What happens beyond these areas of national jurisdiction? Two-thirds of the ocean is in the high seas, areas beyond which individual countries have jurisdiction. And at the moment, there's an ongoing process to try a new international treaty to manage and protect the high seas, the high seas implementing agreement at the U.N. And hopefully, this will allow for the process, basically for marine protected areas to be designated in the global commons in these shared areas.

Dan LeDuc: Help a listener visualize what these might look like on a map, a range of protected areas. Are there little tubes that connect to them so that at least there's some conduit for the fish? Of course, the fish don't know where the tubes are, so how are they going to know how to get from place to place and be safe? How does a network like that work?

Johnny Briggs: Well, it's a good example where we're working now actually for Pew Bertarelli, which is the eastern tropical Pacific. That region is Ecuador, which includes Galápagos; you've got the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia. And all these four countries have their own marine protected areas designated, so little pockets, little islets in their ocean.

At the climate COP in Glasgow, which just happened at the end of last year, the leaders of the four countries came together and announced their intention to have what they call the "swim way," which would actually interconnect all these four marine protected areas to ensure that the megafauna, the turtles, the sharks, the whales moving in between each are actually protected. But what does that mean? As you said, what is that interconnected regional approach?

Well, it might include biological corridors. So, they have actually mapped where species move throughout the year, and you could think, OK, here's a kind of a highway basically where all these awesome species are moving from point A to point B. So let's try to work with fisheries operating in these waters to ensure there isn't bycatch. You have to have this whole ocean, holistic approach for it to work.



You really want a regional governance system, each country speaking to each other, sharing information. There's got to be the long-term sustainable financing, which we discussed about, to really support this regional approach.

Dan LeDuc: And we haven't even gotten into the enforcement side of this. You can create it, but how do you make sure people abide by it?

Johnny Briggs: Well, this was a great part of the Pitcairn story. So, to get to Pitcairn it takes four days. So it takes, I think, longer to get there than it does to get to the moon. From the U.K., you go via Tahiti, and then you get a flight to a place called Mangareva in French Polynesia. And then you take a boat for 2 1/2 days to get to Pitcairn.

It's so isolated, but the community, as I said, wanted to protect their ocean. They wanted to fully protect the vast majority but have local, artisanal fishing around their island so they could sustain themselves. Around 2014, we supported the community to submit a proposal to do this to the U.K. government. And in 2015, the government said, OK, well, we'd like to support this, but it's so isolated; we could designate national park, but how do we know that poachers are not going to come in and fish illegally?

So, Pew actually partnered with a group in the U.K., which was the capability to monitor these huge, isolated areas of the ocean from space using satellites. They'll be able to see if vessels are hiding or potentially fishing illegally within Pitcairn waters. We report that to the U.K. government, who can then follow up.

In other areas like Palau, there's a patrol vessel. So if, from space, you spot potentially nefarious activity, the patrol vessel can be sent to check it out. So, it is possible to do this now in large, highly isolated areas. And we kind of proved the concept of Pitcairn, and that's now being rolled out across a lot of other marine protected areas. But that's a cost element as well, of course. There's a cost to that, and how we finance that in the long term is often at the forefront of our minds.

Dan LeDuc: I want to end with asking, what's your hope and your outlook for these efforts? Where will the ocean be in the next decade or so?

Johnny Briggs: The pieces are in place to really deliver a protected and replenished ocean; we just need to deliver it. And we need the policies to be implemented and we need the political will. We know we spoke about a lot of the things that we need to get to where we want to be. All these things could happen; they could be delivered. We know what needs to happen. We just need to go ahead and have the confidence and assurance, really, to do it. And I'm optimistic we can get there in the end.



Dan LeDuc: We expect to hear more about that optimism in our next episode—the last in our series on “Ocean, People, Planet”—when we look at the new, younger generation of ocean conservationists and what they’re doing to protect the seas around us.

As always, you can find more information on this series, including previous episodes, articles, and videos at pewtrusts.org/oceanpeopleplanet.

Thanks for listening. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I’m Dan LeDuc. And this is “After the Fact.”