

The new Punta Tombo Marine Protected Area in Argentina benefits the world's largest Magellanic penguin colony.

The new MPA is located at the central Patagonian coast, Argentina. It includes 60 kilometers of coastline and it will influence the management of 100,000 hectares that extend up to 12 nautical miles. Its main goal is to protect the feeding area of half a million Magellanic penguins that breed in nearby colonies. The Global Penguin Society (GPS) together with the Government of Chubut Province promoted and financed this initiative, coordinated by Dr. Pablo García Borboroglu.

Right before the change of governors and the President in Argentina, the Legislative Body of Chubut Province approved the Law 103/15 that designates the new Punta Tombo Marine Protected Area. The last Management Plan of the colony stated that the current protected area on land was not sufficient to secure the long-term survival of the penguin populations, since the penguin feeding areas were not protected. In fact, the colony declined 30% since the late 80's, the feeding trips increased 80 km in average per decade and around 40% of the chicks die from starvation annually. The reduction in food availability close to the colony during the most critical stage of the breeding cycle would be one of the main causes of this decline.

This MPA has a clear conservation goal, but it also aims to protect the important eco-tourism industry and to improve the management of the fishing activity. Nature based tourism is one of the main sources of incomes and jobs for this region with over 100,000 tourists per year.

The new area was assigned the IUCN Category VI: a Protected Area with sustainable use of natural resources. The primary objectives of the new MPA are to protect the feeding areas and routes of Magellanic penguins, to improve fisheries practices in order to benefit critical stages of fisheries target species, to promote the sustainable use of the marine ecosystems, to facilitate scientific research towards the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach and to mitigate the effects of climate change. The new Law determines that the future management plan should integrate the human activities and the conservation of the marine biodiversity.

To design the MPA, different research projects results and data-sets were compiled and analyzed, including information provided by the long-term Penguin Project research based at Punta Tombo and the fisheries and jurisdictional data provided by the government.

This new MPA is now part of the core area of the recently designated Blue Patagonia UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the largest one for Argentina with 3.1 million hectares, also promoted by the Global Penguin Society. "This new MPA

designation is an historical accomplishment” Dr. Borboroglu said, “since there is only one protected area in Argentina that is exclusively marine and only 4% of the marine surface of the country is currently protected”.

As mentioned, the Law project and the technical proposal were designed and mainly supported by the Global Penguin Society, which is an internationally recognized leader in the conservation of penguins and the oceans. GPS’ core work includes science-based conservation action, collaboration with multinational stakeholders, and education outreach for communities and governments. Visit www.globalpenguinsociety.org to support and learn more about the work and activities of The Global Penguin Society.

