

National and international organizations make an urgent call to consolidate the expansion of the Galapagos Marine Reserve for the benefit of all the inhabitants of our country.

PRESS RELEASE

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Lenin Moreno - President of the Republic of Ecuador

César Litardo - President of the National Assembly of Ecuador

Alberto Zambrano - President of the Commission on Biodiversity and Natural Resources

To the authorities of the Republic of Ecuador:

The here signers, citizens, researchers, professors, members of organizations, groups and collectives, address you in an urgent call to consolidate the expansion of the Galapagos marine reserve for the benefit of all the inhabitants of our country. During the last 20 years, the Galapagos Marine Reserve has faced increasing fishing pressure from national and foreign fleets. The tuna purse-seine fleet fishes 20 million square kilometers in the Eastern Pacific Ocean using an increasing number of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), which in addition to fishing commercial species, capture juvenile size individuals and other vulnerable or threatened species such as sharks, sea turtles, manta rays, and others. The number of DAPs has been increasing year by year to the point that now, according to the 2019 report of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (CIATT), both yellowfin and bigeye tuna, which are two of the most sought-after species by Ecuador's fishing sector, are showing signs of over-exploitation throughout the Eastern Tropical Pacific (IATTC, 2019). On the other hand, Ecuador's longline fleet operates in waters surrounding the Galapagos Marine Reserve and is responsible for the landing of more than 200,000 sharks annually, among them, critically endangered species (Martinez-Ortiz, Aires-da-Silva, Lennert-Cody, & Maunder, 2015).

Each year on the edge of the island's exclusive economic zone (which separates Ecuadorian and international waters) an imposing foreign fleet fishes for species that enter and leave Ecuadorian waters (Chinacalle-Martínez, 2020), including the current Galapagos marine reserve, (DPNG, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, 2009g, 2010a, 2010b, 2013; El Universo, 2010, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) further increasing the pressure on the region.

Climate change is likely to cause the relative abundance of food in Ecuadorian waters around Galapagos to be greater than in other areas (www.ipcc.ch/srocc/), attracting more international boats and fleets to fish in the area.

The arguments that cling to maintaining the current boundaries of the Galapagos reserve unchanged are unsustainable. The beneficial effect of Marine Protected Areas has been scientifically proven and is not only restricted to the scope of their protection but can also be seen in adjacent unprotected areas. Through a mechanism known as 'spillover' the abundance of fish increases, generating a benefit for the fishing sector (Bucaram et al., 2018; Lynham, Nikolaev, Raynor, Vilela, & Villasenor-Derbez, 2020).

We, the undersigned, inform Ecuadorians that expanded protections for Galapagos will mean benefits for all, including fishermen. It is imperative to increase the area of protection of one of the most important marine ecosystems of the planet. Expanding the Galapagos marine reserve is an investment to guarantee the viability of this ecosystem that Ecuador must assume as a responsibility to its population and the world.

We ask all Ecuadorians to join in defending our natural heritage. The sea of Ecuador belongs to all Ecuadorians.

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