



# CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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FOURTH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO  
THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR  
THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS AND THEIR  
HABITATS IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

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## ABSTRACT: IMPORTANT MARINE MAMMAL AREAS IN THE PACIFIC

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### Summary

The global IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force has an initiative aimed at designating Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMA), defined as a 'discrete portion of habitat, important to marine mammal species, that has the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation' ([www.marinemammalhabitat.org](http://www.marinemammalhabitat.org)). It recognises that marine mammals are often vulnerable to anthropogenic threats, are overlooked in efforts to create marine protected areas – with static Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) typically not providing the protection needed, they are indicators of change so action to protect them often benefits other taxa, and they can be valuable flagship species representing powerful political and public levers for conservation of the marine environment. With the international reach of IMMAs they can input into other international agreements and frameworks to protect the ocean and its inhabitants.

In 2017, the Marine Mammal Task Force held a workshop in Apia, Samoa to define key areas in the Pacific Region – this area included eastern French Polynesia, north to Hawaii, west to the Marianas, Palau and Papua New Guinea. Submissions were made on 44 areas considered by the working group to be areas of importance to marine mammals and after international peer review 20 were designated as IMMAs, 4 were candidate cIMMAs and 20 were left as Areas of Interest (AoI). Most IMMAs and cIMMAs had 15+ species recognised in the areas reflecting the diverse habitat able to support dugongs and cetaceans. Spinner dolphins and humpback whales were frequently included in the IMMA designated areas but there was a wide range of species that fulfilled the criteria for IMMA designation.

The four cIMMAs in Tuvalu, Gilbert Islands, Wallis and Futuna and Vanuatu were recognised as having rich biodiversity but were either poorly surveyed or required stronger evidence of the importance of the proposed area. Comprehensive, published research effort in these areas would be a valuable investment as the cIMMAs will be reviewed again.

Given the wide range of international and domestic agreements and potential pathways and levers to ensure adequate marine protection e.g., IUCN, CMS, FAO, EBSAs, KBA, SPREP – to name a few, the Pacific region IMMAs have great potential to support and be supported by other initiatives. All Pacific countries should be implementing monitoring programmes for marine mammals (this can be incorporated with other observer programmes) and accurately reporting basic sightings, location and species identification information. The upskilling of tour operators, ferry, ship and fishing crews

to collect data using simple apps to report sightings would be a good start – especially for offshore waters where many species are found. The IMMAs are linked to the OBIS-SEAMAP (seamap.env.duke.edu) database where all sightings are mapped. The georeferenced spatial dataset produced for each IMMA are publicly available upon application including descriptions of the metadata (<https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/immas/imma-spatial-layer-download/>).

**For further information please look at:**

IMMA website [www.marinemammalhabitat.org](http://www.marinemammalhabitat.org)

GOBI webinar by Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara and Erich Hoyt, co-chairs of the Marine Mammals Protected Areas Task Force <http://gobi.org/resources/webinars/introducing-important-marine-mammal-areas-a-new-tool-for-global-marine-mammal-and-biodiversity-conservation/>

A brief summary of the Pacific IMMAs by Dr Claire Garrigue [www.pacificnatureconference.com/ird-claire-garrigue](http://www.pacificnatureconference.com/ird-claire-garrigue)