



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



1st Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC1)

Bonn, Germany, 18 – 21 April 2016

UNEP/CMS/ScC-SC1/Doc.10.4.2.1

Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)

Document prepared by the Aquatic Mammals Working Group (AMWG)

Summary:

This document has been prepared by the Aquatic Mammals Working Group of the Scientific Council. It outlines the progress made by the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, and the relevance of this work to CMS.

It recommends that CMS endorse the IMMA criteria, once finalized by the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, and integrates the criteria directly into the Ecological Networks Work Programme. Further, it recommends that Parties identify specific areas where the IMMA criteria could be particularly beneficial and request the support of the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force to progress these approaches.

For reasons of economy, this document is printed in a limited number, and will not be distributed at the meeting. Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copy to the meeting and not to request additional copies.

Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)

Document prepared by the Aquatic Mammals Working Group (AMWG)

1. Critical habitats for marine mammal species extend from the tropics to the poles, from shallow estuarine areas to the high seas. Despite this wide range of habitats, the threats to the vital activities of marine mammals are often remarkably similar including commercial fishing; resource extraction activities such as oil and gas; and commercial shipping. The resulting impacts on marine mammals are direct mortality through bycatch, entanglement and ship-strikes, as well as noise and water pollution leading to habitat degradation. The designation of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other place-based conservation management measures are conservation tools for marine mammals, shown to be effective in a number of areas. Furthermore, considering that marine mammals can be indicator, umbrella and flagship species, place-based protection of marine mammals can lead to wider marine biodiversity conservation.

2. Overall, MPAs, and the subset of marine mammal protected areas (MMPAs: areas which include marine mammal habitat protection) are poorly represented in the EEZs of most countries. On the high seas, in international and domestic planning, until recently marine mammals have been largely left out of the discussion.

3. Yet protecting habitat for wide-ranging marine mammals and their ecosystems is starting to come of age. Between 2004 and 2011, the number of declared protected areas for whales and dolphins rose from 359 to 575 mainly in national waters with a further 175 areas at the proposal stage. From 2008-2014, eight large areas (150,000-2,000,000 km²) were added to the highly protected MPA coverage, with at least some potential benefits for marine mammals. Worldwide, the percentage of MPA coverage now measures 3.4 percent of the global oceans' surface, but the highly protected areas only cover 0.7 percent. It should be noted that for the most part, these MPAs are largely political compromises, and rarely coincide with ecosystems that support marine mammal populations. In areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), the coverage is only 0.25 percent. However, the opening of discussions in 2015 on the ABNJ within the framework of UNCLOS, which aims to create mechanisms for creating and enforcing MPAs on the high seas, has a good prospect for the habitats of wide-ranging marine mammals.

4. A new consistent approach was needed to identify marine mammal habitats for protection throughout the world's oceans. Attention was paid to BirdLife International, with its marine important bird areas (marine IBAs) tool, which has spearheaded seabird protection efforts in national waters and on the high seas with the first world seabird atlas in 2012 and in data sets presented at CBD EBSA meetings and other fora. In October 2013, the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the World Commission on Protected Areas, with the assistance of the International Committee on Marine Mammal Protected Areas, set up the IUCN [Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force](#) (hereafter the "Task Force"). Adapting the BirdLife IBA approach to marine mammals, the first activity of the Task Force has been the introduction of the concept of important marine mammal areas (IMMAs) defined as "discrete portions of habitat, important for one or more marine mammal species, which have the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation."

5. Two workshops have tested criteria and proposed a future programme of work. Identifying IMMAs will lead not only to more MPAs and MPA networks but better marine

spatial planning (MSP), as well as enable risk reduction of ship strike, noise, bycatch and other threats, and help with monitoring for climate change.

6. CMS has recognized this work and the value of IMMAs in '[Resolution 11.25: Advancing Ecological Networks to Address the Needs of Migratory Species](#)' and also the role that CMS can play in coordinating conservation and management measures across species migratory ranges, contributing to the development of ecological networks and promoting connectivity that is fully consistent with the law of the sea.

Status of IMMA Criteria and Toolkit

7. The criteria for identifying IMMAs were reviewed by experts and sent out for wide public consultation during 2015. The criteria, now finalized for public release in 2016, have been streamlined to match up well with the criteria for identifying CBD ecologically or biologically significant areas (EBSAs) as well as the IUCN standard for the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Thus, IMMAs will provide a standardized process for evaluating, presenting and using marine mammal data which will contribute substantially to both the EBSA process and the future identification of KBAs, as well as serving marine mammal only needs (e.g., identifying ship strike and other areas where marine mammals are threatened, fulfilling marine mammal network needs, and providing place-based information on marine mammals for MSP).

8. An IMMA Toolkit will also be prepared by the Task Force to help give direction to the regional workshops envisioned as part of the implementation of IMMAs throughout the world's oceans. This Toolkit will show how to consider and compare the suitability of information available from datasets, scientific methodologies and expert knowledge when applying the criteria. It is anticipated to be a living document, similar to the toolkit used by BirdLife International for informing the selection of marine IBAs. The Task Force is currently facilitating a number of workshops across a series of international conferences to seek expert advice on the consideration of many methods and techniques presently available to inform the selection of IMMAs (including species distribution modelling, behavioural methods and tracking, genetic analyses). The outputs of these workshops will facilitate the creation of the IMMA toolkit in 2016.

CMS and IMMAs

9. The '[Annex to CMS Resolution 11.25: Recommendations for Further Advancing the Design and Implementation of Ecological Networks to Address the Needs of Migratory Species](#)' indicates a number of areas of direct relevance to the evolving IMMA work.

10. Parties are encouraged to consider using a combination of connecting 'hotspots', buffering the core, providing 'spare' capacity at times of ecological stress and disruption, and otherwise spreading risks across multiple locations.

11. Parties are specifically asked to explore options for obtaining and making available globally synthesized information about the spatial needs of migratory species when they are looking at these species' life cycles and migratory ranges as part of a consideration of ecological networks (actions defined in [Resolution 10.3](#), paragraph 7 and 9(i)).

12. In the context of the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023, CMS has also sought to investigate the scope for indicators used for place-based conservation measures for

migratory species (target 10) to shed light specifically on network-related aspects such as representativity and connectivity.

AMWG recommendations

13. The AMWG recommends that CMS Parties:
 - a) endorse the IMMA criteria, once finalized by the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, and integrate the criteria directly into the Ecological Networks Work Programme; and
 - b) identify specific areas where the IMMA criteria could be particularly beneficial (for example, stimulating network design and connectivity, addressing threats more comprehensively) and to request the support of the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force to progress these approaches.

Action Requested:

- i. Take note of the report
- ii. Respond to the recommendations made by the Aquatic Mammals Working Group