Important Marine Mammals Areas (IMMAs)

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**Working Paper submitted by France, the United Kingdom, Chile, Germany, Monaco and South Africa**

***Summary***

France, the United Kingdom, Chile, Germany, Monaco and South Africa recommend that the CEP advises the ATCM to recognise the importance of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) within the Treaty area as a tool to assist Parties when planning and conducting activities in Antarctica, through the adoption of a Resolution (see Annex 1).

The WP co-authors further recommend that the CEP advises the ATCM to give consideration to assessing the extent to which these IMMAs could be useful in the development of new Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) with a marine component or in the revision of management plans of existing ASPAs and Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMAs).

***Introduction***

To date, the CEP and ATCM has focussed on marine mammals during discussion in several working and information papers, among which ATCM XLII IP31 on the effect of noise on marine mammals, ATCM XLII IP97 on IAATO procedures for operating in the vicinity of whales, ATCM XLI IP59 on the polar code and marine mammal avoidance planning, or ATCM XL IP75 on the use of fisheries service for surveying marine mammals. In particular, the IMMAs could help support the delivery of the recommendations of ATCM XLII WP62 on the Status and Monitoring of Antarctic Seal Species, especially for “assessing the available management tools for the protection of Antarctic seals and considering whether additional protection for Antarctic seals is required”.

It is clear that there is a need for further developments in our understanding of marine mammal biology and distribution, as well as their conservation. The CEP has started to look at more systematic methods of protecting Antarctic bird colonies through the endorsement of the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) as a useful planning tool (Resolution 5, 2015); however, as yet, no such progress has been made with regard to the protection of marine mammals.

***Important Marine Mammal Area concept***

The IMMA concept is modelled on the successful example of the BirdLife International process for determining IBAs. The IMMAs are identified according to specific criteria, that capture critical aspects of marine mammal (seals and cetaceans) biology, ecology and population structure, including vulnerability, distribution, abundance, special attributes and key life cycle activities.

***Workshop***

During 15-19 October 2018 a scientific workshop was held in Brest, France, to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas in the Southern Ocean (see related Information Paper IP “*Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAS) within the Antarctic Treaty area: An international collaboration to inform habitat-related conservation decision-making and conservation planning for marine mammal species*” presented by IUCN and SCAR). The workshop was held in cooperation with the French Biodiversity Agency and the IUCN Global Marine and Polar Program, through its Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (‘MMPA Task Force’ or ‘Task Force’). The workshop included 20 marine mammal scientists and two observers from eleven countries selected by and from the SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Marine Mammals.

The workshop focused on the Southern Ocean and extended from Antarctica to the sub-Antarctic islands in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans. The scientific workshop participants used evidence published in the peer-reviewed scientific literature to identify thirteen Important Marine Mammal Areas in the Southern Ocean. Following an evaluation by an external review panel, these IMMAs are now presented in the Task Force e-atlas ([www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/](http://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/)) and are accompanied by concise profiles, boundaries and details of how each proposal meets one or more of the eight IMMA criteria and sub-criteria. The “Final Report of the Fourth IMMA Workshop” (2018)[[1]](#footnote-1) is a useful source of information, contributing to the state of knowledge in the Southern Ocean.

***IMMAs within the Antarctic Treaty area***

Importantly, the present Working Paper only considers the four IMMAs (out of the 13 identified) that are located wholly or partially within the Antarctic Treaty area, i.e.:

1. the Western Antarctic Peninsula Islands IMMA;
2. the Scott Islands and Iselin Bank complex IMMA;
3. the Ross Sea ecosystem IMMA; and
4. the section of the Scotia Arc IMMA which lies within the Antarctic Treaty area.

It is noted that through Resolution 5 (2015) the CEP recognised the usefulness of IBAs as a tool help to limit adverse impacts on the Antarctic environment. Similarly, IMMAs could be useful to Parties as a tool to assist when planning and conducting activities in Antarctica, including:

* by informing the Environmental Impact Assessment process;
* the development of environmental monitoring programmes; and
* the identification of potential future ASPAs and ASMAs designations, or in the updating of existing protected area management plans.

For example, although IMMAs include large proportion of marine environments in their definition, they represent foraging zones of seals that haul-out on the ice or come ashore to molt or reproduce. As such, IMMAs may indicate the likely presence of haul-out/breeding sites on terrestrial sites that may add to the environmental values within an area considered for ASPA or ASMA designation.

**Recommendations**

France, the United Kingdom, Chile, Germany, Monaco and South Africa recommend that the CEP advises the ATCM to:

* recognise the importance of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) within the Treaty area as a tool to assist Parties when planning and conducting activities in Antarctica, through the adoption of a Resolution (see Annex 1);
* request the CEP gives further consideration to assessing the extent to which the scientific information behind these IMMAs could be useful in the development of new Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) with a marine component or in the revision of management plans of existing ASPAs and Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMAs).

**Annex 1: Draft Resolution on Important Marine Mammals Areas**

Resolution XXX (2021)

Important Marine Mammals Areas in Antarctica

The Representatives,

*Recognising* that, in some parts of Antarctica, a changing Antarctic climate is having an observable effect on native wildlife, and is projected to modify substantially the sea-ice dependent ecosystems;

*Recalling* Article 3 of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (“the Protocol”), which requires that activities in the Antarctic Treaty area shall be planned and conducted so as to limit adverse impacts on the Antarctic environment;

*Recalling* also the requirements of Annex II to the Protocol on the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora;

*Desiring* to ensure that conservation practices in Antarctica are consistent with best scientific knowledge available;

*Aware* of the potential for harmful disturbance to marine mammals in Antarctica from a range of human activities in the region;

Aware also that ongoing research is required to further improve the state of knowledge of the status and trends of Antarctic marine mammal populations;

**Recommend** that their Governments:

1. welcome and acknowledge the content of the “Final Report of the Fourth IMMA workshop” (2018) (“the report”) for the three identified Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) that are within the Antarctic Treaty area (the Western Antarctic Peninsula and Islands IMMA, the Scott Islands and Iselin Bank Complex IMMA, and the Ross Sea Ecosystem IMMA) and the section of the Scotia Arc IMMA which lies within the Antarctic Treaty area, which covers reproductive grounds, molt grounds, feeding areas and/or migration routes;

2. bring the report to the attention of the Secretariat of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources;

3. take account of the information in the report on IMMAs within the Antarctic Treaty area in the planning and conduct of their activities in Antarctica, including in the preparation of environmental impact assessments;

4. consider the extent to which the scientific information behind these IMMAs could be useful to the development of new Antarctic Specially Protected Areas with a marine component, or when reviewing existing management plans of Antarctic Specially Protected Areas or Antarctic Specially Managed Areas; and

5. continue to undertake appropriate on-land and at-sea monitoring of marine mammal populations to inform future management actions that may be required.

1. IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, 2020. Final Report of the Fourth

   IMMA Workshop: Important Marine Mammal Area Regional Workshop for Extended Southern

   Ocean, Brest, France, 15-19 October 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)