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 welcomes the content of the “Final Report of the Fourth IMMA workshop” (2018) and acknowledges 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.

The WP co-authors further recommend that the CEP advises its members 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 (seals and cetaceans) 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. The SC-CCAMLR working group on Ecosystem Monitoring and Management (WG-EMM) noted in 2015 and 2019 the work on IBAs, highlighting the role of this work, enhancing the available data layers required for the risk assessment. During CCAMLR-40, the Scientific Committee noted the work to identify IMMAs through an international collaboration.

This working paper was first submitted at CEP XXIII, but as time did not allow for an in-depth discussion the CEP agreed to continue discussion at CEP XXIV.

***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 derived from IBAs and adapted to marine mammals integrating both activities on land and at sea. The criteria capture critical aspects of marine mammal’s biology, ecology and population structure, including vulnerability, distribution (on land, on sea ice, at sea surface and at great depths), abundance, 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 CEP XXIII IP024 for more information). 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 participants had extensive experience of working with marine mammals in the wider Southern Ocean region.

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 and long-term existing data 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 scientific work for these thirteen areas is now completed. Additional scientific data collection in the future may also help identify new IMMAs. 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:

* welcomes and acknowledges 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, moulting grounds, feeding areas and/or migration routes;
* consider the need to list tools of particular importance (e.g. IMMA, marine IBA, RAATD) to the work of the Committee when planning and conducting activities in Antarctica in a single Resolution which could be amended as new scientific results become available;
* encourages its members to 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;
* encourages its members to 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
* encourages its members to 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)