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TITLE: Results of efforts by the Convention on Biological Diversity to describe ecologically or biologically significant marine areas

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ABSTRACT:

In 2004, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) addressed a United Nations (UN) call for area-based planning, including for marine-protected areas that resulted in a global effort to describe ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs). We summarized the results, assessed their consistency, and evaluated the process developed by the Secretariat of the CBD to engage countries and experts in 9 regional workshops held from 2011 to 2014. Experts from 92 countries and 79 regional or international bodies participated. They considered 250 million km² of the world's ocean area (two-thirds of the total). The 204 areas they examined in detail differed widely in area (from 5.5 km² to 11.1 million km²). Despite the initial focus of the CBD process on areas outside national jurisdiction, only 31 of the areas examined were solely outside national jurisdiction. Thirty-five extended into national jurisdictions, 137 were solely within national jurisdictions, and 28 included the jurisdictions of more than 1 country (1 area lacked precise boundaries). Data were sufficient to rank 88-99% of the areas relative to each of the 7 criteria for EBSAs agreed to previously by Parties to the CBD. The naturalness criterion ranked high for a smaller percentage of the EBSAs (31%) than other criteria (51-70%), indicating the difficulty in finding relatively undisturbed areas in the ocean. The highly participatory nature of the workshops, including easy and consistent access to the relevant information facilitated by 2 technical teams, contributed to the workshop participants success in identifying areas that could be ranked relative to most criteria and areas that extend across jurisdictional boundaries. The formal recognition of workshop results by the Conference of Parties to the CBD resulted in these 204 areas being identified as EBSAs by the 196 Parties. They represent the only suite of marine areas recognized by the international community for their greater importance for biodiversity it is their importance for biodiversity itself not conservation as process explicitly excluded management issues than their surroundings. This comes at a critical juncture in negotiations at the UN that will consider developing a new implementation agreement under UN Convention of the Law of the Sea to support the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. The EBSA description process is a good example of how to bring the international community together to build a shared understanding of which ocean areas are particularly valuable to biodiversity.

SOURCE: Conservation biology

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