

Joint Statement by the IUCN WCPA/SSC Task Forces

4 November 2015

Defining the relationship between IMMAs, KBAs, and other area-based marine conservation initiatives

The IUCN WCPA-SSC Joint Task Force on Biodiversity and Protected Areas

and

the IUCN WCPA-SSC Joint Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas,

having met in Abu Dhabi during the IUCN SSC Leaders Meeting, 15-18 September 2015,

- noting that the development of the IUCN Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), led by the Joint Task Force on Biodiversity and Protected Areas, responds to Resolution WCC 3.013 requesting the SSC, working in partnership with IUCN Members, “to convene a worldwide consultative process to agree a methodology to enable countries to identify Key Biodiversity Areas, drawing on data from the IUCN Red List and other datasets, building on existing approaches and paying particular attention to the need to: (i) enlarge the number of taxonomic groups used for site-based priority-setting approaches; (ii) have quantitative, transparent and objective criteria to identify Key Biodiversity Areas”;
- stressing that KBAs are an overarching framework (umbrella) allowing taxon- or thematic-specific initiatives to be nested under it;
- emphasizing the agreement reached during the Framing Workshop in 2012 (Cambridge, UK) that KBAs are sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity; KBAs represent the most important sites for biodiversity worldwide but are not necessarily priorities for any specific type of conservation action. KBAs are identified nationally using globally standardised criteria and thresholds for elements of biodiversity that benefit from legal protection, safeguard or management at the site scale; and KBAs may or may not receive formal protection, but should ideally be managed in ways that ensure the persistence of the biodiversity for which they are important;
- recalling that Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) developed by the Joint Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas to represent the priority sites for marine mammal conservation worldwide, have a special conservation value in consideration not only of the specific vulnerability of many marine mammal species, but also of the value of these mammals’ role as indicators, umbrella and flagship species which support the identification of MPAs and spatial protection measures;
- clearly recognizing the need to ensure complementarity of KBA and IMMA identification processes and alignment of criteria to encourage participation and support and to avoid possible confusion between the two standards, so that the future IMMA network will support and be supported by the extension of the approach to all biodiversity through KBAs;
- understanding that a single standard for KBAs is desired by end users and will enhance conservation by being credible, standardized and readily available;
- further recognizing that data availability in marine ecosystems may sometimes make the

- application of threshold-based criteria challenging;
- further recognizing that the process of IMMA identification will significantly facilitate the testing and identification of potential KBAs throughout the ocean;
 - having ensured that the IMMA criteria are aligned with the KBA criteria;
 - recognizing that a number of critical marine conservation initiatives are already running in the ocean including, among others, Convention for Biological Diversity EBSAs, IMO PSSAs, regional or country-led MPA proposals, and Hope Spots, and that they will continue to run with the full support of IUCN and its Members to their natural conclusions, and noting that these initiatives utilize available information on marine ecosystems, habitats and species to inform important choices about where and what to protect in the ocean;
 - further noting that, over time, KBA information, along with marine mammal data presented through IMMAs, will help support the above initiatives for particular species groups, by providing a list of potential sites for these initiatives through the analysis of global datasets, in a consistent and repeatable manner, and thus help expand opportunities for protection and management:

have agreed that the IMMA process can be integrated, wherever data are available, into application of the KBA standard to the benefit of both initiatives and that the complete alignment of the two processes is desirable.

A process is envisioned in which IMMAs will be identified according to IMMA criteria through the use of best available evidence. Further revisions of the IMMA criteria, as well as potential revisions of KBA criteria, will be reviewed in an effort to harmonize them. Resulting IMMAs will be investigated iteratively against the KBA criteria and thresholds, thereby enhancing the identification of KBAs with marine mammals. The process of identifying IMMAs, proposed to occur with assembled experts and prepared data sets in a series of regional workshops (similar to the CBD EBSA process), will enable the testing and identification of potential KBAs throughout the open ocean. Such candidate KBAs could then be submitted to IUCN and the other KBA Partner organizations for review and recognition as KBAs.

In the future, as greater ecological knowledge of marine mammals in specific locations becomes available, it is also envisioned that more IMMAs will be identified through the use of new high quality evidence. Such sites will be more readily assessable using threshold-based criteria to become additional KBAs which feature marine mammal species.

It is acknowledged that IMMAs will retain their independent, specific value to contribute to marine mammal conservation in specific ways, e.g., through marine spatial planning, EBSAs, MPA establishment and adaptive management of existing MPAs, IMO shipping directives, noise and bycatch considerations.