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МЕЖПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННАЯ ОКЕАНОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ КОМИССИЯ
اللجنة الدولية الحكومية لعلوم المحيطات
政府间海洋学委员会

UNESCO – 7 Place de Fontenoy - 75352 Paris Cedex 07 SP, France
<http://ioc.unesco.org> - fax: +33 (0)1 45 68 58 12 - contact phone: +33 (0)1 45 68 39 83/84
E-mail: v.ryabinin@unesco.org

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(Available in English only)

IOC-CBD/WA
12 August 2015

To : Official National Coordinating Bodies for liaison with the IOC
Permanent Delegates/Observer Missions to UNESCO of IOC Member States
IOC Officers

cc : CBD Secretariat
IOC/OBIS Secretariat

**Subject : Joint IOC-CBD letter on the 204 marine areas meeting the criteria
for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas**

The purpose of this Circular Letter is to raise awareness of the work within the Convention on Biological Diversity related to ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), in particular the description of 204 areas meeting the EBSA criteria, as described by a series of CBD regional workshops convened since 2011.

In 1997, the secretariats of the IOC and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to develop joint activities in the field of marine and coastal biodiversity. IOC's contribution to the protection of marine ecosystems entered a new phase in 2009, the year when IOC, through Resolution XXV-4, agreed to adopt the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS) from the Census of Marine Life (2000–2010). Since then, IOC has been maintaining and developing OBIS. The global scope of OBIS makes it possible to identify marine biodiversity hotspots and large-scale ecological patterns in all parts of the world's oceans.

In 2010, the CBD Conference of the Parties (COP), through decision X/29, requested the Executive Secretary of the CBD to organize a series of regional workshops to facilitate the description of EBSAs. Pursuant to this request, eleven regional EBSA workshops have been convened since 2011, covering more than 70% of the world's oceans. COP, at its eleventh and twelfth meetings, considered the results of the first nine regional EBSA workshops, namely the description of 204 areas meeting the EBSA criteria. The results of the workshops held since 2014 will be submitted to the twentieth meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the thirteenth meeting of COP in 2016.

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Chairperson

Prof. Peter M. HAUGAN
Director, Geophysical Institute
University of Bergen
Allegaten 70
5007 Bergen
NORWAY

Executive Secretary

Dr Vladimir RYABININ
Intergovernmental Oceanographic
Commission — UNESCO
7 Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris Cedex 07 SP
FRANCE

Vice-Chairpersons

Mr Stephen P. HALL
Head, International and Strategic
Partnerships Office
National Oceanography Centre
European Way
SO14 3ZH Southampton
UNITED KINGDOM

Dr Alexander POSTNOV
Deputy Director
State Oceanographic Institute
ROSHYDROMET
6, Kropotkinsky Lane
119034 Moscow
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Mr Ariel Hernan TROISI
Head, Oceanography Department
Navy Hydrographic Service
Av. Monte de Oca 2124
C1270ABV Buenos Aires
ARGENTINA

Dr Somkiat KHOKIATTIWONG
Senior Marine Biologist
Phuket Marine Biological Center,
Dept of Marine and Coastal Resources
51 Moo 8, Sakdhidej Rd.
Wichit, Mueang District
Phuket 8300
THAILAND

Dr Ashley S. JOHNSON
Director, Oceans Research
Department of Environmental
Affairs
Foretrust Building
M. Hammerschlagt Way
Foreshore
SW Cape 8000 Cape Town
SOUTH AFRICA

In decision X/29, COP also requested the Executive Secretary of the CBD to work with Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations, including IOC (through OBIS), to facilitate availability and inter-operability of the best available marine and coastal biodiversity data sets and information across global, regional and national scales.

As the largest single data repository for biological data for the world's oceans and one that plays a vital role in scientific analysis to support a number of international processes, OBIS has been one of the primary data sources for the regional EBSA workshops.

Pursuant to a request by the CBD COP at its twelfth meeting in October 2014, we herewith share with you the summary reports of the regional EBSA workshops that been considered by COP in six official CBD languages:

English: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-22-en.pdf>
Spanish: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-22-es.pdf>
French: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-22-fr.pdf>
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Chinese: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-22-zh.pdf>

The annex to this Circular Letter contains additional background information on the EBSA process. Further information on the CBDs work on EBSAs is available at <https://www.cbd.int/ebsa>.

We hope that the scientific information on areas meeting the EBSA criteria will be helpful to supporting national efforts to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. We also hope that you will consider contributing additional data to the IOC Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS).

[signed]

[signed]

Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias
Executive Secretary CBD

Vladimir Ryabinin
Executive Secretary IOC

Background Information: The work within the Convention on Biological Diversity on EBSAs

I. The work of the Convention on EBSAs

1. **Scientific criteria for EBSAs.** At its ninth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted scientific criteria for identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) in need of protection in open-ocean waters and deep-sea habitats (decision IX/20, annex I). The criteria include uniqueness or rarity; special importance for life-history stages of species; importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats; vulnerability, fragility, sensitivity or slow recovery; biological productivity; biological diversity; and naturalness (see annex I of decision XI/20 at <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-09/cop-09-dec-20-en.pdf>).

2. **Application of scientific criteria.** COP 10 noted that the scientific criteria in annex I of decision IX/20 for the identification of EBSAs represent a tool that Parties and competent intergovernmental organizations may choose to use to progress towards the implementation of ecosystem approaches in relation to areas both within and beyond national jurisdiction, through the identification of areas and features of the marine environment that are important for conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity. COP 10 also noted that the application of the EBSA criteria is a scientific and technical exercise, that areas found to meet the criteria may require enhanced conservation and management measures, and that this could be achieved through a variety of means, including marine protected areas and impact assessments.

3. **Who identifies EBSAs.** COP 10 emphasized that the identification of EBSAs and the selection of conservation and management measures is a matter for States and competent intergovernmental organizations, in accordance with international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

4. **Description of areas meeting the scientific criteria for EBSAs at regional level.** COP 10 requested the Executive Secretary to organize a series of regional workshops with a primary objective to facilitate the description of EBSAs through application of the scientific criteria (annex I to decision IX/20) as well as other relevant compatible and complementary nationally and intergovernmentally agreed scientific criteria.

5. **Information for describing and identifying EBSAs.** COP 10 also highlighted that identification of EBSAs should use the best available scientific and technical information and integrate the traditional scientific, technical and technological knowledge of indigenous and local communities, and requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate availability and inter-operability of the best available marine and coastal biodiversity datasets and information across global, regional and national scales, in collaboration with Parties, other governments, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC–UNESCO), in particular the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS), the Central Data Repository run by International Seabed Authority (ISA), and other relevant international scientific partnerships producing credible, quality-controlled scientific information, such as the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP–WCMC), and the Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative (GOBI).

6. **Consideration by COP of the summary report on areas described to meet the EBSA criteria.** COP 10 requested the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) to prepare reports based on scientific and technical evaluation of information from the regional workshops, setting out details of areas that meet the scientific criteria for consideration by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

7. Regional workshops for describing ecologically or biologically significant marine areas

a. Pursuant to decision X/29, regional workshops on describing EBSAs were convened by the Executive Secretary for the Western South Pacific (November 2011) and the Wider Caribbean and Western Mid-Atlantic (February-March 2012) regions, and the results were reviewed by SBSTTA at

its sixteenth meeting, and considered by the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh meeting. Pursuant to decision XI/17, the summary reports on the description of areas that meet the criteria for EBSAs, prepared by SBSTTA, were submitted to the United Nations General Assembly as well as its relevant working groups, by means of a letter from the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity addressed to the Secretary General of the United Nations (available as UNGA document A/67/838).

b. Pursuant to decisions X/29 and XI/17, seven additional regional workshops have been organized since SBSTTA-16 for the Southern Indian Ocean region (July-August 2012); the Eastern Tropical and Temperate Pacific region (August 2012); the North Pacific region (February–March 2013); the South-Eastern Atlantic region (April 2013); the Arctic region (March 2014); the North-West Atlantic region (March 2014); and the Mediterranean region (April 2014). The results of these workshops were reviewed by SBSTTA at its eighteenth meeting and, subsequently, by the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Pursuant to decision XII/22, the summary reports on the description of areas that meet the criteria for EBSAs, prepared by SBSTTA at its eighteenth meeting, were also submitted to the United Nations General Assembly as well as its relevant working groups by means of a letter from the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity addressed to the Secretary General of the United Nations.

c. The full reports of all of these workshops are available at www.cbd.int/ebsa.

d. Since COP 12, additional workshops have been convened for the North-East Indian Ocean region (March 2015) and the North-West Indian Ocean region (April 2015), and are being planned for the Black Sea and Caspian Sea (scheduled for October 2015), and East Asian Seas (scheduled for December 2015), pursuant to decisions X/29, XI/17 and XII/22. The results of these workshops will be reviewed at SBSTTA-20 and considered at COP 13. Moreover, as recognized in decision XI/17, additional workshops for the further description of areas already described may be held where new information becomes available, subject to the availability of financial resources.

8. ***Use of scientific information on EBSAs.*** COP 12 encouraged Parties and other governments to make use, as appropriate, of the scientific information regarding the description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria, including the information in the EBSA repository and information-sharing mechanism, as well as the information from indigenous and local communities as well as relevant sectors, including the fisheries sector, when carrying out marine spatial planning, development of representative networks of marine protected areas, taking into account annex II to decision IX/20, and application of other area-based management measures in marine and coastal areas, with a view to contributing to national efforts to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

II. EBSA Repository and Information-sharing Mechanism

9. COP 10 requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with Parties and other governments, FAO, UN-DOALOS, IOC–UNESCO, in particular OBIS, and other competent organizations, UNEP–WCMC and GOBI, to establish a repository for scientific and technical information and experience related to the application of the scientific criteria on the identification of EBSAs, and to develop an information-sharing mechanism with similar initiatives, such as FAO's work on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). Subsequently, pursuant to paragraph 16 of decision XI/17, whereby the purpose of the EBSA repository and information-sharing mechanism was further elaborated, the following differentiation is made between the two:

(a) The EBSA repository includes:

- (i) Descriptions and maps of areas meeting the EBSA criteria, prepared by the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in line with the purpose and procedures set out in decisions X/29, XI/17 and XII/22, that the Conference of the Parties has requested the Executive Secretary to include in the repository as source of information for Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations; and
- (ii) Scientific and technical information and experience relating to the application of the EBSA criteria, or of other relevant compatible and complementary nationally and

intergovernmentally agreed scientific criteria, in areas within national jurisdiction (for those Parties and other Governments that have specified that the information is to be included in the repository, consistent with paragraph 18 of decision XI/17 and paragraph 7 of decision XII/22).

- (b) The EBSA information-sharing mechanism includes:
- (i) Reports prepared by the Subsidiary Body consistent with paragraph 12 of decision XI/17;
 - (ii) The reports of the regional workshops convened pursuant to decisions X/29 (paragraph 36), XI/17 (paragraph 12), and paragraph 6 of decision XII/22;
 - (iii) Scientific and technical information and experience relating to the application of the EBSA criteria, or other relevant compatible and complementary nationally and intergovernmentally agreed scientific criteria;
 - (iii) Other relevant scientific and technical information related to the areas described to meet the EBSA criteria; and
 - (iv) Links with similar initiatives, such as FAO's work on vulnerable marine ecosystems (decision X/29, paragraph 39).

10. In order to increase accessibility to the information contained in the EBSA repository and information-sharing mechanism as described above, the EBSA portal website (<http://www.cbd.int/ebsa/>) was developed as a gateway to the EBSA repository and information sharing-mechanism. The EBSA portal website thus aims to facilitate the use of available scientific and technical information related to areas meeting EBSA criteria by a wide range of stakeholders, and to convey the outcomes of the regional workshops to facilitate the description of EBSAs in a clearly understandable way. It also intends to improve general understanding about the EBSA process, facilitate participation in future regional/subregional EBSA workshops, and promote the application of the EBSA criteria at the national level.