

PAME II-2014 Agenda Item 6 (c)

Arctic Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in Helsinki, Finland

Summary Paper submitted by Finland

Background

At its tenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) requested the Executive Secretary to organize a series of regional workshops with a primary objective to facilitate the description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) through application of scientific criteria as well as other relevant compatible and complementary nationally and intergovernmentally agreed scientific criteria, as well as the scientific guidance for the application of EBSA criteria.

The CBD Secretariat convened the Arctic Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs), in collaboration with the Arctic Council Working Group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF). The workshop was hosted by the Government of Finland and was held from 3 to 7 March 2014 in Helsinki, Finland.

The workshop was attended by experts from Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, United States of America, SBSTTA Bureau, Arctic Council Working Group on the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, Arctic Council Working Group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative (GOBI), International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Marine and Polar Programme, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Marine Mammal Council, Natural Resources Defense Council, North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, OSPAR Commission Secretariat, Saami Council, United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Studies, and WWF Russia.

Scientific criteria for identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs)

In 2008, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 9), at its ninth meeting, adopted the following scientific criteria for identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas in need of protection in open-ocean waters and deep-sea habitats (further details available at <http://www.cbd.int/marine/doc/azores-brochure-en.pdf>).

CBD scientific criteria for ecologically or biologically significant areas (EBSAs)

(annex I, decision IX/20)

1. Uniqueness or Rarity
2. Special importance for life history stages of species
3. Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats
4. Vulnerability, Fragility, Sensitivity, or Slow recovery
5. Biological Productivity
6. Biological Diversity
7. Naturalness

Further information on Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) is available online at www.cbd.int ; <http://www.cbd.int/marine/doc/ebsa-brochure-2012-en.pdf>

The Geographic Scope

The workshop participants agreed on the following geographic scope for the workshop:

- (a) The regional geographical delineation of the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council, Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF). This constituted the starting geographic scope of the workshop;
- (b) Marine areas within the national jurisdiction of the Russian Federation, as proposed by the experts from the Russian Federation based on national processes, except for the areas already considered by the North Pacific regional workshop described above;
- (c) Marine areas within the national jurisdiction (200 nautical miles, nm) of Canada, Greenland (Kingdom of Denmark), Norway, and the United States of America were excluded from consideration by this workshop;
- (d) In the Pacific, the Bering Strait was taken as a southern boundary for this workshop as no additional information was identified to complement previous work done by the North Pacific workshop referred to above;
- (e) In the Atlantic, the CAFF boundary was retained as the southern boundary for the workshop. It was noted that some of the areas beyond national jurisdiction in central Arctic waters had been included in the scope of the Joint OSPAR/NEAFC/CBD Scientific Workshop on the Identification of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in the North-East Atlantic (Hyères, France, 8-9 September 2011). The participants agreed that the work at the current workshop would complement previous work in the area of overlap.

Results

The workshop participants noted that the entire Arctic Ocean has important ecological features that, when viewed on a global scale, justify a higher degree of risk aversion in the Arctic than would be the norm for many lower-latitude marine regions, if management is to keep human uses sustainable and adequately protect biodiversity.

Finally, participants in the workshop agreed on the description of 11 areas meeting the EBSA criteria (refer to summary description of these areas in table 5 of document UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/4/Add.1; further details of description are contained in the appendix to annex VIII of the workshop report, UNEP/CBD/EBSA/WS/2014/1/5).

These areas are:

1. The marginal ice zone and the seasonal ice-cover over the deep Arctic Ocean
2. Multi-year ice of the Central Arctic Ocean
3. Murman Coast and Varanger Fjord
4. White Sea
5. The south-eastern Barents Sea (the Pechora Sea)
6. The coast of Western and Northern Novaya Zemlya
7. North-eastern Barents–Kara Sea
8. Ob-Enisei River Mouth Area
9. Great Siberian Polynya
10. Wrangel and Gerald Shallows and Ratmanov Gyre
11. Coastal Waters of Western and Northern Chukotka

The first two areas (1. marginal ice and the seasonal ice-cover, 2. multi-year ice) are located in the High Sea area. The rest of the areas are located in the Russian territorial waters.