Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

on the occasion of

20th Session of the International Seabed Authority Assembly
(14 to 25 July 2014, Kingston, Jamaica)

Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide an update on the CBD's scientific and technical work related to marine and coastal biodiversity, focusing on our work on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas.

In 2008 at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, Parties adopted a set of scientific criteria to be used in identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (also called EBSAs). At this meeting, COP urged Parties, and invited other Governments, and relevant organizations to apply, as appropriate, the EBSA criteria to identify ecologically or biologically significant marine areas, with a view to assist the relevant processes within the UN General Assembly and implement conservation and management measures, in accordance with international law.

At its tenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties noted that the application of the scientific criteria for the identification of EBSAs presents a tool which Parties and competent intergovernmental organizations may use to implement ecosystem approaches in relation to areas both within and beyond national jurisdiction, through the identification of areas and features of the marine environment that may require enhanced conservation and management measures.

COP 10 also noted that the application of the EBSA criteria is a scientific and technical exercise, and that enhanced conservation and management can be achieved through a variety of means, including marine protected areas and impact assessments. Parties 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 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

With a view to supporting the efforts of States and intergovernmental organizations, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to work with Parties and other Governments as well as competent organizations and regional initiatives to organize a series of regional workshops with a primary objective to facilitate the description of EBSAs through the application of the EBSA criteria.

Since November 2011, the CBD Secretariat has convened nine regional workshops to facilitate the description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria, covering nearly 70% of the oceans. These nine regional workshops have described more than 200 areas meeting the EBSA criteria and involved about 122 countries and 113 organizations, with some attending more than one workshop.

The Conference of the Parties, at its eleventh meeting, considered the summary report on the results of the first two workshops, in the Western South Pacific region and in the Wider Caribbean and Western Mid-Atlantic region, and upon the request of COP at this meeting, the summary report was submitted to the UNGA and its relevant processes in 2013, and made available as UNGA document A/67/838. The results of the other seven workshops were submitted for consideration to the eighteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in June 2014, and will be submitted to the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in October 2014.

Additional workshops are being planned for the North-East Indian Ocean, the North-West Indian Ocean and for the East Asian Seas. Further workshops may be organized for other regions where Parties request them, in line with decision XI/17. 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.

The EBSA process undertaken since the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in partnership with various global and regional partners has facilitated the sharing of scientific information and data, networking of experts across disciplines at the regional scale, and enhanced collaboration between various initiatives for marine conservation and sustainable use by providing a global regional platform for a scientific assessment of the ecological or biological significance of marine areas.

In order to support the sharing of scientific and technical information related to EBSAs, the CBD Secretariat has developed an EBSA portal website (http://www.cbd.int/ebsa/), which is linked to the global EBSA repository, pursuant to COP requests in decisions X/29 and XI/17. This website will continue to be improved as more scientific information emerges and as States and relevant organizations gain more experience in applying the EBSA criteria.

The CBD Secretariat has also been conducting capacity development efforts related to the EBSAs. Pursuant to decision X/29, EBSA training manual and modules were developed to provide guidance on applying the EBSA criteria using different types of scientific and technical information. The CBD Secretariat also is working to develop training materials on the use of traditional knowledge in the application of the EBSA criteria, pursuant to decision XI/17. Additional capacity development efforts related to EBSAs have been undertaken through the framework of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative. These include capacity development workshops aimed at promoting exchange of information and experiences, and building regional-level partnerships to support the efforts of States and relevant organizations in achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, including through the use of the EBSA criteria.

Finally, let me assure you that the CBD Secretariat is ready to work closely with States and relevant organizations to ensure that the best available scientific information on marine and coastal biodiversity can be provided for consideration during your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.