9th November 2017

Subject: Response to CBD Notification SCBD/SPS/DC/SBG/JL/JG/86798 in reference to 'Submission of information to support the objectives of the expert workshop to develop options for modifying the description of areas meeting the criteria for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), for describing new areas, and for strengthening the scientific credibility and transparency of the EBSA process."

Dear Ms Palma,

We would first like to thank the CBD Secretariat for this opportunity to share experiences related to the subject above mentioned. In response to this invitation, BirdLife is herewith presenting the work on marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, which has been a relevant part of the EBSAs described so far.

This submission will share the experience of:

- Incorporating new scientific information into a pre-existing process for the designation of significant areas;
- Ensuring scientific credibility and transparency in the use of specific criteria for designating significant and/or sensitive/vulnerable areas, including through processes for regular peer-review.

BirdLife International has been working collectively, as a Partnership, to identify, document and protect all places on earth of greatest significance for the conservation of the world's birds, including in the marine realm. As a result, over 3,000 marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (mIBAs) have been identified to date across the world (https://maps.birdlife.org/marineIBAs/default.html). IBAs are identified using a standardised set of data-driven criteria and thresholds, ensuring that the approach can be used consistently worldwide.

Data on the marine IBAs (mIBAs) were widely used to inform the description of current EBSAs: data from as many as ~600 marine IBAs of the existing ~3,000 have been incorporated within described EBSAs, across all regional EBSAs workshop. Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas are also the largest subset of Key Biodiversity Areas identified to date. The submission by KBA Partnership, which BirdLife International secretariats together with IUCN, presents further details on criteria and thresholds to identify these sites.

The mIBA identification framework uses pelagic seabirds tracking data to delineate areas of global biodiversity importance. In 2004 BirdLife International created the *Tracking Ocean Wanderers* tool – a global Seabird Tracking Database. This Database is the largest collection of seabird tracking data worldwide. Initially built upon data of 16 albatross species, the Tracking Database has expanded significantly to other groups of seabirds. It now gathers data of 114 seabird species, with over 21

thousand tracks and over 11 million points. This expressive increment in data availability is enabling BirdLife to further consolidate the mIBA identification work. With these new data available, BirdLife is not only reviewing existing sites, but also being able to identify other key sites of biodiversity importance where once there were data gaps. Therefore, the consistence of the marine IBA network is constantly being improved in view on new scientific information.

The recent work developed by BirdLife in the West Indian Ocean (WIO) region illustrates this approach. This region is characterised by high biodiversity, both in terms of species and ecosystems, and is an important area for seabirds including 20 globally threatened species. However, the region is also experiencing increasing cumulative impacts and has a low level of protection and it is thus an important focus for conservation efforts. Identification of areas that are important for biodiversity is key to inform future management decisions.

The Tracking Database has received considerable additional seabird tracking data for the WIO, with contributions from 29 researchers, totalling almost 3,000 tracks (~1 million points) from 30 species. In order to mobilize more data and to validate the identification of areas, BirdLife just recently convened a regional workshop, inviting over a dozen experts in the region, including on marine mammals and sea turtles. Data of each marine IBA was reassessed and gaps identified. That exercise included areas overlapping with EBSAs described in that region. A similar exercise has already been conducted in the North East Atlantic region – the OSPAR Convention region and will expand to other regions.

We believe there is a great value in the new data being produced to the EBSAs process. Parallel to the efforts in increasing data availability, the IUCN's Council has approved "A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas" (https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/46259. This provides Parties of the CBD with a scientifically agreed set of thresholds that can support the description of EBSAs. That would provide EBSAs process with increased credibility and transparency (the submission by the KBA Partnership offers more detail in this regards).

Therefore, we are convinced that the current EBSAs should be reviewed and gaps assessed to take into account the substantial new information, including the example of substantial new data available on animal tracking, mentioned above. Data and expertise provided by civil society organizations and academia have proved to be of great value to the EBSAs description process to date and offer our continuous support to follow this fruitful collaboration.

For more information:

Carolina Hazin, Global Biodiversity Policy Coordinator, carolina.hazin@birdlife.org

Maria Dias, Senior Marine Science Officer, maria.dias@birdlife.org