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CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
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Fifteenth meeting
Montreal, Canada, 7-19 December 2022
Agenda item 20A1

Ecologically or biologically significant marine areas in the North-East Atlantic Ocean and adjacent areas

Draft decision submitted by the Chair of Working Group II

The Conference of the Parties

1. *Acknowledges* that the Executive Secretary, as requested by the Conference of the Parties at its tenth and eleventh meetings,¹ has successfully completed the series of regional workshops, covering most of the world's ocean, facilitating the description of 338 areas meeting the criteria for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas;
2. *Expresses its appreciation* to all Parties, other Governments, organizations and stakeholders that have contributed to this process, and *encourages* continued efforts to describe areas meeting the criteria for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas using the best available scientific information and to increase the number and coverage of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas around the world;
3. *Expresses its gratitude* to the Government of Sweden for hosting the Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in the North-East Atlantic Ocean, as well as the Governments of Denmark, France, Germany and Sweden for providing financial support for the workshop, and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic and the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission for providing valuable scientific and technical input;
4. *Welcomes* the summary reports prepared by the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice at its twenty-third meeting, which are annexed to the present draft decision and are based on the report of the Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in the North-East Atlantic Ocean;²
5. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to include the summary reports in the EBSA repository, and to submit them to the United Nations General Assembly and its relevant processes, as well as Parties, other Governments and relevant international organizations, in line with the purpose and procedures set out in decisions [X/29](#), [XI/17](#), [XII/22](#), [XIII/12](#) and [14/9](#).

¹ See decisions [X/29](#), para. 36, and [XI/17](#), para. 12.

² [CBD/EBSA/WS/2019/1/5](#).

Addendum

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE DESCRIPTION OF AREAS MEETING THE SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA FOR ECOLOGICALLY OR BIOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT MARINE AREAS IN THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC OCEAN AND ADJACENT AREAS

BACKGROUND

1. Pursuant to decision [X/29](#), paragraph 36, decision [XI/17](#), paragraph 12, decision [XII/22](#), paragraph 6, decision [XIII/12](#), paragraph 8, and decision [14/9](#), paragraph 4, a regional workshop was convened by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity to facilitate the description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) in the North-East Atlantic Ocean (Stockholm, 23-27 September 2019).³
2. The description of areas as meeting the criteria for EBSAs does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Nor does it have economic or legal implications; it is strictly a scientific and technical exercise.
3. Pursuant to decision XI/17, paragraph 12, a summary of the results of this regional workshop is provided in table 1 below, while full descriptions of how the areas meet the criteria for EBSAs are provided in an annex to the report on the workshop.
4. In decision X/29, paragraph 26, the Conference of Parties 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 can be achieved through a variety of means, including marine spatial planning, marine protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures and impact assessment. It also 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.⁴

Key to the tables

RANKING OF EBSA CRITERIA

Relevance

H: High

M: Medium

L: Low

-: No information

CRITERIA

- **C1:** Uniqueness or rarity
- **C2:** Special importance for life-history stages of species
- **C3:** Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats
- **C4:** Vulnerability, fragility, sensitivity, or slow recovery
- **C5:** Biological productivity
- **C6:** Biological diversity
- **C7:** Naturalness

³ For the report on the workshop, see CBD/EBSA/WS/2019/1/4.

⁴ [United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1833, No. 31363.](#)

Table 1. Description of areas meeting the EBSA criteria in the North-East Atlantic Ocean and adjacent areas

(Details are provided in the report of the Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in the North-East Atlantic Ocean ([CBD/EBSA/WS/2019/1/4](https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/aa9a/bde9/eaf24f73bd471d64e8094722/ebsa-ws-2018-01-04-en.pdf)))

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
	See the above key to the tables						
<p>1. Danish Skagerrak</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: This area is situated in the Danish part of the Skagerrak. The area reaches westwards to 6°45'E, to Skagen, the northern tip of Jutland, and stretches northeast from Skagen. It comprises an area of 7,876 km² and reaches depths from the coastline to 465m. The northern and western parts cover the southern reach of the Norwegian Trench. This area focuses on a highly productive upwelling zone along the southern edge of the Norwegian Trench. This area has high fish biomass and diversity, and the upwelling zone also provides valuable feeding grounds for a number of cetacean and bird species. 	H	H	M	L	H	M	L
<p>2. Danish Kattegat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The Kattegat area comprises the northern part of the inner Danish waters. It is bordered to the south by the north coast of Sealand, to the west by the northeast Jutland coast, to the east by the Danish-Swedish border and to the north by a line from the northernmost point of Denmark to the northeast. It covers a total area of 14,995 km². The existing EBSA (Area no. 9: Fladen and Stora and Lille Middelgrund), described in the CBD regional EBSA workshop for the Baltic Sea, borders this area (see workshop report here: https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/aa9a/bde9/eaf24f73bd471d64e8094722/ebsa-ws-2018-01-04-en.pdf). The Danish part of Kattegat hosts a landscape comprising shallow sandy flats, deeper muddy channels and areas with boulder reefs and bubbling reefs. The area has a diverse avifauna, with elements from pelagic environments in the North Sea, as well as wintering birds from breeding grounds in the Russian Federation and Scandinavia. Parts of the area are difficult to access for human activities and thus serve as valuable moulting sites for seabirds, such as common scoter and velvet scoter. The area is a meeting site for two subpopulations of harbour porpoise. Eelgrass meadows exist here, although they are smaller than they were in the year 1900. Seaweed forests and rich fauna are found on boulder reefs and bubbling reefs in this area, and infauna communities have high biomasses. Horse-mussel beds are found primarily in the southern part of Kattegat, where they form biogenic reef structures. <i>Haploopsis tubicola</i>, a small crustacean, is present in the area, but no longer forms a specific habitat with high densities. 	H	H	H	H	M	M	M
<p>3. Cantabrian Sea (Southern Bay of Biscay)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The area is located in the south of the Bay of Biscay and is bounded by the parallels 43° 25'N and 45° 00'N and meridians 2° 10'W and 7° 00'W. The feature for which this area is described also extends eastwards and northwards, beyond the boundaries currently described. The Cantabrian Sea ecosystem includes the continental shelf and slope and the deep abyssal basin (5000 m water depth) located along the northern border of the Iberian Peninsula (Southern Bay of Biscay), from the Capbreton Canyon head to Estaca de Bares Cape, on the Galician coast. It is a highly complex area, where the narrow 	H	H	H	H	H	H	L

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
See the above key to the tables							
<p>continental shelf is deeply affected by the action of tectonic compression. The area contains important geomorphological elements, such as large submarine canyons and seamounts. The hydrology is also complex due to the interaction between waters formed in the Atlantic and waters of Mediterranean origin. This area includes a variety of benthic habitats, including habitats that are considered hotspots of biodiversity. These habitats serve as spawning grounds for several commercial species. The area also contains habitats for endangered, threatened and declining species and for migratory pelagic species, including cetaceans.</p>							
<p>4. West Iberian Canyons and Banks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: The area is located in waters surrounding Portugal and Spain. Its total area is 189,239 km² and is divided into three sections: North Western Iberian Peninsula, Center Western Iberian Peninsula and South Western Iberian Peninsula. The area includes 12 submarine canyons, five seamounts structures, banks, islands and an archipelago. • The area includes marine protected areas (including six OSPAR Marine Protected Areas), one UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, 12 Natura 2000 Sites of Community Interest and 10 Natura 2000 Special Protection Areas for seabirds. The area is divided into three sections: North Western, Centre Western and South Western. The features in the area are hotspots of marine life, and they represent areas of enhanced productivity, especially when compared with surrounding areas. The area has a high diversity of benthic communities and spawning grounds for several species, and it is an important area for cetaceans. A total of 3,411 species are listed in the area, 11 per cent of which are protected under international or regional law. 	H	H	H	H	H	H	L
<p>5. Gulf of Cádiz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: The area is located to the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula. Its eastern boundary is the Strait of Gibraltar, on the western border of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bounded by the parallels (37° 00'N and 35° 56'N) and meridians (6° 00'W and 7° 24'W). • The area is very structurally complex and contains important geomorphological elements such as large submarine canyons and seamounts. The hydrology is also complex due to the interaction between waters formed in the Atlantic and waters of Mediterranean origin. This area includes a variety of benthic habitats, both on soft and rocky bottoms, that are considered hotspots of biodiversity, and which serve as various habitats for endangered, threatened and declining species. It is also a seasonal migratory pathway for large migratory pelagic species and is, in particular, an important area for cetacean species. 	H	H	H	H	H	H	L
<p>6. Madeira – Tore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: The area is bounded by the parallels 39°28`4.39``N and 33°31`17.04``N, and the meridians 13°31`12.88``W and 14°25`58.54``W. • This area includes 19 remarkable structures, 17 of which are seamounts. Seamounts are hotspots of marine life and, in general, they are areas of enhanced productivity, especially when compared with surrounding abyssal areas. Madeira – Tore has an area of 197,431 km², with depths ranging from 25m (top of Gettysburg seamount) to 4930m (bottom of Tore seamount). The area includes a proposed Site of Community Importance (Gorringe Bank) and an 	H	H	H	H	H	H	M

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
	See the above key to the tables						
OSPAR High Seas Marine Protected Area (Josephine seamount). A total of 965 species are present in this area, 7 per cent of which are protected under international or regional law.							
<p>7. Desertas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: This area includes the marine areas adjacent to the Desertas Islands. It has an area of 455 km² and is located southeast of Madeira Island, Portugal (32.47N/-16.52W). The Desertas Islands hold some of the most important colonies of seabirds in the Atlantic, with large populations of Procellariiforms, including the only population of vulnerable Desertas petrel (<i>Pterodroma deserta</i>). They also contain important reproductive and resting habitats for the endangered monk seal (<i>Monachus monachus</i>) in the form of pupping caves and resting beaches. 	H	H	H	H	-	-	-
<p>8. Oceanic Islands and Seamounts of the Canary Region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The area is located in and around the Canary Islands, between the parallels 24°60'N and 32°27'N and meridians 20°96'W and 30°33'W. It includes volcanic edifices (e.g., emerged islands, seamounts and banks) and has a maximum depth of 3000 m. The area around the Canary Islands includes a set of islands and seamounts influenced by magma-driven processes over tens of millions of years over the Canary hotspot. The archipelago is made up of seven major islands, a group of islets in the northeast and three seamount fields: one in the northeast of the archipelago, one in the southwest and another between the islands. Some of these seamounts (Concepción Bank, El Banquete and Amanay) as well as coastal areas of the Canary region have been intensively studied. Thirty-nine marine Special Areas of Conservation and two Sites of Community Importance (both under the Natura 2000 network), as well as three marine reserves are located in the area. This region, with its subtropical oceanographic conditions, represents the southern distribution limit for many pelagic and benthic species. It includes a variety of benthic habitats, including some that are considered hotspots of biodiversity. These habitats serve as spawning grounds for several commercial species. The area also includes habitats for endangered, threatened and declining species and for migratory pelagic species, including cetaceans. 	H	H	H	H	H	H	M
<p>9. Tropic Seamount</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The Tropic Seamount is located in the North-East Atlantic (23°55' N, 20°45' W), along the north-western African continental margin. The Tropic Seamount is home to numerous vulnerable taxa, including high-density octocoral gardens, <i>Solenosmilia variabilis</i> patch reefs, xenophyophores, crinoid fields and deep-sea sponge grounds. A recent study offered the first biological insight to ground-truth the occurrence of potential vulnerable ecosystems on the Tropic Seamount, alongside predictive models to increase the spatial coverage beyond surveys conducted by remotely operated and autonomous underwater vehicles. Predicted habitat for the glass sponge (<i>Poliopogon amadou</i>), a biogeographically restricted hexactinellid forming extensive near-monospecific grounds, was found to favour the deep seamount flanks of this area within a very narrow oceanographic regime. 	H	-	H	H	M	H	H

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
See the above key to the tables							
<p>10. Atlantis-Meteor Seamount Complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The area is situated roughly 700 km south of the Azores and about 1500 km northwest of Africa. It has a total area of 134,079 km², with depths ranging from 265m (top of Atlantis seamount) to 4800m (bottom of Great Meteor seamount). The area is bounded by the parallels 35°30'0,000''N and 29°12'0,000''N and meridians - 27°0'0,000''W and -31°30'0,000''W. The Atlantis-Meteor Seamount Complex comprises 10 seamounts. These seamounts are hotspots of marine life and areas of enhanced productivity, especially when compared with surrounding abyssal areas. This seamount complex has a total area of 134,079 km², with depths ranging from 265m (top of Atlantis seamount) to 4800m (base of Great Meteor seamount). A total of 437 species are present in this area (with 16 per cent of mega- and macrofauna and up to 91 per cent of meiofauna endemic to the seamount group), 3.9 per cent of which are protected under international or regional law. 	H	H	H	H	M	H	M
<p>11. Ridge South of the Azores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The area is located on the Atlantic Ocean – South of the Azores. This area has structures at depths ranging from 3460 m (inferred depth – south Oceanographer FZ), to the mid-range at 2320 m (measured depth – Rainbow), to the shallowest at Albert Monaco Ridge. This area encompasses the axial valley and ridge crests of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, from the Menez Gwen hydrothermal vent field area to the Haynes fracture zone. At the east ridge crest, the area includes part of the Alberto Monaco Ridge and seamount-like features associated with the western portions of the ridge. The area includes three marine protected areas (part of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas) – Lucky Strike, Menez Gwen and Rainbow vent fields. The features in this area are both hotspots of marine life and areas of enhanced productivity when compared with surrounding bathyal and abyssal areas. The hydrothermal temperatures range between 10° C (Menez Hom and Saldanha) and 362° C (Rainbow). The area also includes other seafloor features at the ridge crest that host sponge aggregations, cold-water corals and other charismatic fauna. 	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
<p>12. Graciosa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: This area encompasses the surrounding waters of Graciosa Island and two smaller islands: Baixo and Praia islets. It has an area of 277 km² and is the northernmost island of the Azores, Portugal (39.05N/-27.99W). This is a key area for the only breeding population of the vulnerable and endemic Monteiro's storm-petrel (<i>Hydrobates montei</i>) and is also important for the breeding population of the Audubon's shearwater (<i>Puffinus lherminieri baroli</i>), which is listed by OSPAR as a threatened and/or declining species. Many other seabirds occur in these waters, such as band-rumped storm-petrel (<i>Hydrobates castro</i>), Cory's shearwater (<i>Calonectris borealis</i>), common tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) and roseate tern (<i>Sterna dougallii</i>). All of these species have low recovery rates and are highly sensitive to environmental degradation or depletion by human activity. 	H	H	H	H	-	-	-
<p>13. North Azores Plateau</p>	H	H	H	H	M	H	M

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
	See the above key to the tables						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: The area is spread over a wide part of the Atlantic Ocean, north of the Azores. The area is home to multiple types of structures (i.e., hydrothermal vent field, Mid-Atlantic Ridge North of the Azores High Seas Marine Protected Area, seamounts), which are very distinct in terms of biology and geology, and which have different compositions, locations and ages. This area is composed of several seamounts, one hydrothermal vent field, an undersea trough and a large portion of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge north of the Azores Plateau. The structures in this area are hotspots of marine life and, in general, are areas of enhanced productivity, especially when compared with surrounding abyssal areas. The Moytirra is the first known deep-sea hydrothermal vent field on the slow-spreading Mid-Atlantic Ridge north of the Azores, making this area highly unique. A total of 536 species have been observed in this area, 6 per cent of which are protected under international or regional law. 							
<p>14. Mid-North-Atlantic Frontal System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: This area has a well-defined western boundary (front), coinciding with the maritime boundary of the OSPAR Commission. It extends north along the east flank of the Grand Banks, where it forms a loop called the Northwest Corner and continues to the east. The northern boundary is defined by the northern extent of the Subpolar Front at 54°N. The North Subarctic Front is topographically fixed at the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone at 30°W. It is known that the North Atlantic Current and frontal branches vary strongly, with latitudinal shifts up to 250-300 km. Thus, maps of annual means have been used to ensure that the area’s full temporal variability has been captured. This is a remote area of intense mesoscale activity with near stationary eddies and numerous thermal fronts aligned in zonal bands. These fronts and eddies enhance primary productivity and retain and concentrate secondary productivity both vertically and horizontally. The combination of localised high- intensity mixing in the eddies results in patchy, high-surface productivity at fine scales. Tracking data collected for seabirds, whales, sea turtles, tunas and sharks (several of which are globally threatened) confirm that this is an area of high productivity with a high intensity of foraging activity, suggesting that this productivity cascades to higher trophic levels. 	-	H	M	H	H	H	H
<p>15. Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: This area extends from 48°N and 55°188’N along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone occurs at 52°30’N. The area extends from about 25°W to 45°W, with the transform faults occurring between 30°W and 35°W. The eastern boundary of the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone is detectable beyond 42°W. The southern ridge continues uninterrupted to 45°W. This area encompasses the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone, the meandering Sub-polar Frontal Zone and the benthic communities of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge in this area, including individual seamounts. Fracture zones are common topographic features of the ocean that arise through plate tectonics. The Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone is an unusual left lateral strike-slip double transform fault in the North Atlantic Ocean, along which the rift valley of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is offset by 350 km near 52°30’ N. It opens the deepest connection between the northwest and northeast Atlantic (maximum depth of approximately 4500 m) and is approximately 2000 km in 	H	-	H	H	-	H	M

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
See the above key to the tables							
<p>length, extending from about 25° W to 45° W. It is the most prominent interruption of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge between the Azores and Iceland and the only fracture zone between Europe and North America that has an offset of this size. Two named seamounts are associated with the transform faults: Minia and Hecate. The area is a unique geomorphological feature in the North Atlantic. Further, it captures the Earth's geological history, including significant ongoing geological processes. The sub-polar front is also representative of a pelagic frontal system. The area is described based on its importance as a section of the northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge and is a biogeographically representative section of the northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge. There is evidence of both deep-sea sponge aggregations and cold-water corals in this area. In addition, the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is the only extensive hard substrate available for the propagation of benthic suspension feeders off the continental shelves and isolated seamounts in the region.</p>							
<p>16. Southern Reykjanes Ridge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Situated, partly, on the continental shelf of Iceland, the northern boundary of the area is Iceland's Exclusive Economic Zone. The southern boundary of this area is 55°188'N, well north the Sub-Polar Front, which separates the warm- and cold- water masses and is usually found between 52°N and 53°N. The 2,500 m depth contour was used to define the boundaries of the area, as this captures most of the Ridge crest and known distribution of deep-water corals (maximum 2,400 m). • Reykjanes Ridge is part of a major topographic feature of the Atlantic Ocean, the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The Mid-Atlantic Ridge separates the Newfoundland and Labrador Basins from the West-European Basin and the Irminger Sea from the Iceland Basin, influencing hydrography and circulation. The ridge crest is generally cut by a deep rift valley along its length, bordered by high rift mountains, which are bordered by high fractured plateaus. This region is largely composed of volcanic rock, which is the foundation of the area and provides a hard-bottom substrate for the colonization of benthic communities, including vulnerable and habitat-forming species. The area supports several endangered and threatened shark and ray species. The Ridge itself and its complex hydrographic setting contributes to enhanced vertical mixing and turbulence, resulting in areas of increased productivity above it. The 2,500 m depth contour is used to delineate the boundary of the area, capturing most of the Ridge crest and known distribution of deep-water corals. 	H	M	H	H	M	H	-
<p>17. Hatton and Rockall Banks and Basin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: The area is situated in the North-East Atlantic approximately 400-500 km west-northwest of Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and 400-500 km south-southeast of Iceland. It comprises the seabed and pelagic zones shallower than 3000m overlying the Rockall and Hatton Banks, together with the Rockall-Hatton Basin between them. The 3,000 m contour has been selected as delineating the boundary of this feature because: (i) it marks the accepted boundary between the bathyal and abyssal environments; (ii) review of oceanographic data suggests the 3,000 m contour corresponds well with the oceanographic influence of the feature and thus its likely influence on pelagic communities and (iii) new data on birds and mammals suggest that species use the pelagic areas just off the bank, which are captured by the boundary of this area. 	H	M	H	H	M	H	M

Location and brief description of areas	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
	See the above key to the tables						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Hatton and Rockall Banks, as well as their associated slopes and connecting basin, represent offshore pelagic and bathyal habitats from the surface to 3,000 m deep that collectively constitute a unique and prominent feature of the North-East Atlantic. The area has high habitat heterogeneity and supports a wide range of benthic and pelagic species and associated ecosystems. Its comparatively remote oceanic location several hundred kilometres from the continental shelf afford it a level of protection and isolation from many human activities that are known to degrade the natural marine environment. 							
