



CBD

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Biodiversity and Climate Change

STATEMENT

by

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**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

at the

**EXPERT WORKSHOP ON ECOLOGICAL CRITERIA AND
BIOGEOGRAPHIC CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS FOR
MARINE AREAS IN NEED OF PROTECTION**

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Distinguished Experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this important Expert Workshop on Ecological Criteria and Biogeographic Classification Systems for Marine Areas in Need of Protection. I would like to first extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Portugal for generously hosting the Workshop on this beautiful island.

Vast expanses of the world's oceans, about 64% of the total area, lie beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. They include some of the least explored and rarely studied areas on Earth, as well as some of the most intensively exploited and heavily degraded environments.

With the technological advances of the past few decades, such as advanced acoustics, remotely operated vehicles, human occupied submersibles, and other advanced underwater technologies, much has been added to our knowledge of deep-sea habitats, and people have begun to realize the value and contribution of this large and remote habitat to life on Earth.

For example, deep-seabed habitats, long perceived to be a biological desert, host a wealth of species. Hydrothermal vents were the first ecosystem on Earth found to be independent from the sun as an original source of energy, relying instead on chemosynthesis. Deep-sea hydrothermal vent organisms tolerate great extremes in water temperature and survive potentially toxic concentrations of heavy metals. They are therefore of particular interest because of their adaptation to a high pressure/high temperature environment.

Seamounts and the water column above them serve as important habitats, feeding grounds, and reproduction sites for many open-ocean and deep-sea species of fish, sharks, sea turtles, marine mammals, seabirds, and benthic organisms of great variety. As such, seamounts may form biological hotspots with a distinct, abundant and diverse fauna, and sometimes contain many species new to science. Cold-water coral reefs may be many thousands to millions of years old. Because of their age and slow growth rates, reefs contain high-resolution records of long-term climate change and may also be important speciation centres in the deep sea. Recent research in paleo-climatology has discovered the enormous potential of climate records in the skeletons of cold-water corals, since they are found in all oceans and at all depths, from sea level to at least 4 km under water.

As noted by the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its eighth meeting, deep seabed ecosystems beyond the limits of national jurisdiction are under an increasing threat from various human activities. The most pressing threats come from overfishing, destructive fishing practices, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities. In addition, the discovery of the enormous potential value of genetic resources associated with deep-seabed habitats to various sectors, particularly the health and food sectors, has intensified deep-seabed research and bioprospecting, albeit restricted to those actors who own the requisite technological capacity and the financial resources to access these remote areas.

Other emerging problems affecting deep-seabed habitats include marine debris, ship-based marine pollution, transfer of alien invasive species, illegal dumping and the legacy of historical dumping, seabed minerals development, and noise pollution. The combined impacts of the above-mentioned threats have placed thousands of species at risk of extinction, and have impaired the structure, function, productivity and resilience of marine ecosystems.

At the present time, the world's oceans are seriously under-protected, with only approximately 0.6% of the oceans and 6% of territorial seas being within protected-area systems. In response to rising concerns on the health of deep sea ecosystems, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development called for countries, in its Plan of Implementation, to develop and facilitate the use of diverse approaches and tools, including the ecosystem approach, the elimination of destructive fishing practices, the establishment of marine protected areas consistent with international law and based on scientific information, including representative networks by 2012.

The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity also adopted the following targets as part of a larger framework of targets for the year 2010 relating to specific biomes: (i) at least 10% of each of the world's marine and coastal ecological regions effectively conserved; and (ii) particularly vulnerable marine and coastal habitats and ecosystems, such as tropical and cold-water coral reefs, seamounts, hydrothermal vents, mangroves, seagrasses, spawning grounds and other vulnerable areas in marine habitats effectively protected. Additional targets were also defined as part of the programme of work on protected areas.

Each of these global targets recognized the need to protect areas representative of the full range of biodiversity found in the world's oceans. They also identified networks of marine protected areas as the primary tool to achieve this protection, but acknowledged that marine protected areas alone are not enough, and that achieving these targets will also require sustainable management actions over the wider marine and coastal environment in an ecosystem approach context.

To move forward this challenging task of meeting the global targets, there is a need to identify marine areas needing protection in terms of biological and ecological value as well as level of threat and vulnerability. In this regard, the Conference of Parties at its eighth meeting decided to convene a scientific expert workshop to agree on ecological criteria and biogeographic classification systems for marine areas in need of protection, and requested the Executive Secretary to provide the results of the workshop for consideration at a meeting of Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice prior to its ninth meeting.

With this background, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity has organized this workshop in close collaboration with relevant groups of experts, who have been leading extensive scientific deliberation in various other forums, on the agenda items under consideration in this workshop. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the experts who have provided the Secretariat with necessary technical advice, guidance and information documents, in designing the detailed content of the workshop.

Finally, I sincerely wish that you have a fruitful discussion in the next three days and conclude the workshop with a great success.

I thank you for your attention.