



Document title	Information on the upcoming CBD Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea
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Background

At the [United Nations Conference](#) “Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14” HELCOM Contracting Parties registered [the voluntary commitment](#) to identify Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea.

A workshop to identify Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in the Baltic Sea will be organized in February 2018 in collaboration between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and HELCOM. This document contains information on the workshop and the EBSA concept.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information on the EBSA workshop in Baltic Sea and consider how its outcomes could be taken into account in national and regional work on MSP in the future.

The CBD Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea

The Workshop

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Regional Workshop to Facilitate the Description of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea will be held from 19 to 24 February 2018 in Helsinki, Finland. The workshop is convened by the CBD Secretariat in collaboration with HELCOM and the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, and is financed by Finland and supported by the EU co-financed HASPSII project. The initiative to arrange a Regional EBSA workshop for the Baltic Sea was introduced by Finland and has been agreed to by the HELCOM HOD, bearing in mind especially the possibilities the EBSA concept offers for Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). Identifying EBSAs in the Baltic Sea has also been contributed as one of the [HELCOM voluntary commitments](#) to the UN Ocean Conference held in June 2017 in New York, aiming to accelerate the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14.

The nine Baltic Sea countries will be invited by the CDB Secretariat to nominate national experts to the workshop. Relevant HELCOM Observers and other relevant regional organizations will be invited. The CBD Secretariat, a GIS expert team from the Duke University and the HELCOM Secretariat will also attend the workshop.

The intention is that all available relevant data hosted in HELCOM are used to support the EBSA identification, in addition to any data that countries may decide to submit for the identification process.

The expected result of the workshop is that all areas of ecological and biological importance (based on current knowledge and best available information) in the Baltic Sea will be identified and categorized in a structured way utilizing a recognized method.

Utilizing the EBSA concept in further work

In the Baltic Sea region the EBSAs are expected to contribute to fulfilling the regional goal of producing and applying maritime spatial plans that are coherent across borders and apply the ecosystem approach. In MSP the EBSAs could be utilized as green infrastructure features that ensure the protection of the state and biodiversity of the marine ecosystem as well as improve its functioning while promoting ecosystem services.

The EBSA process has also a potential to contribute to other activities, of which the MPA network is perhaps the most obvious. In addition to providing information on potential areas to be considered for inclusion in the network, as may be decided by the coastal countries, the results of the EBSA workshop could be utilized when evaluating effectiveness and coherence of the network, as well as for management purposes.

Other activities that can benefit from the EBSA process include the RED LIST of both species and of biotopes and habitats. The EBSA exercise can provide information on which areas are important for species and biotopes and habitats assessed in the RED LIST process.

The EBSA process will also contribute to the overall understanding of the functioning of the Baltic Sea and has a potential to provide information for, and the possibility to improve, the HELCOM Holistic Assessments and its processes, e.g. through inclusion in the ecosystem component maps produced as part of the Baltic Sea Impact Index work.

The results of the EBSA work are also foreseen as being valuable in the decision making process of where to focus measures to achieve maximum effect, e.g. for planning blue corridors or measures to improving the ecosystems resilience to the effects of climate change, as well as for the spatial and temporal planning of monitoring.

The EBSA concept and process

[The EBSAs](#) are special areas in the ocean that serve important purposes, in one way or another, to support the healthy functioning of oceans and the many services that it provides.

Identification of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas is done according to the established scientific criteria (adopted by the Parties to the CBD).

These criteria are:

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

In 2010, the CBD Conference of Parties (COP) 10 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 protected areas (MPA) and impact assessments. The COP further noted that the application of the EBSA criteria is an open and evolving process that should be continued to allow ongoing improvement and updating as improved scientific and technical information becomes available in each region. For more details on the EBSA criteria, please see [this document](#).

EBSA can provide useful information that can be used for actions to safeguard the species and habitats in these areas as may be decided individually or collectively by the countries concerned. However, EBSA are not MPAs, even if they can in some cases overlap with the existing MPAs – if the criteria fit the site. EBSA do not have the legal protection or other implications of MPAs.

The first EBSAs identified were very large, in many cases larger than the Baltic Sea. Later on, also smaller areas have been identified as EBSA e.g. in the Mediterranean and South-East Atlantic Ocean EBSAs.

The identification of EBSAs is a matter for States and competent intergovernmental organizations, in accordance with international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and is done in workshops.

Several regional workshops have been organized in different parts of the world:

- Western South Pacific (*held in Nadi, Fiji, in 2011*)
- Eastern Tropical and Temperate Pacific (*held on Galapagos, Ecuador, in 2012*)
- South Indian Ocean (*held in Flic en Flac, Mauritius, in 2012*)
- The Wider Caribbean and Western Mid-Atlantic (*held in Recife, Brazil, in 2012*)
- North Pacific (*held in Moscow, Russian Federation, in 2013*)
- South-East Atlantic Ocean (*held in Swakopmund, Namibia, in 2013*)
- Arctic (*held in Helsinki, Finland, in 2014*)
- North-West Atlantic (*held in Montreal, Canada, in 2014*)
- The Mediterranean (*held in Málaga, Spain, in 2014*)
- North-East Indian Ocean (*held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 2015*)

- North-West Indian Ocean and Adjacent Gulf Areas (*held in Dubai, UAE, in 2015*)
- Seas of East Asia (*held in Xiamen, China, in 2015*)
- Caspian and Black Seas (*held in Baku, Azerbaijan, April 2017*)
- Considered: North-Eastern Atlantic

Map of EBSA sites (Source: [CBD](#))



After being identified by the regional workshops, the proposed EBSAs are reviewed by the technical body of CBD (SBSTTA) and put forward for endorsement to CBD COP and inclusion into the CBD EBSA Repository.

More information on EBSAs

[CBD Brochure on the EBSA criteria](#)

[Example of an EBSA workshop report](#)

- This is the workshop report from the Arctic EBSA workshop. The EBSA workshop reports are drafted, reviewed and agreed to by the workshop participants during the workshop. Preparatory work is also needed for compiling information used in the EBSA descriptions.
- The EBSA descriptions are contained in the appendix to annex VIII (on page 52)
- The workshop reports also contain syntheses of key issues that were addressed during the workshop. In this case, for example, the workshop addressed the unique regional significance of the Arctic (page 28), challenges related to the use of traditional knowledge (page 34) and socio-cultural information (page 43) and scientific information needs and knowledge gaps (page 49).
- This workshop also illustrates how different types of areas can be described as EBSAs, from small static features to large spatially and temporally dynamic features such as the Arctic ice edge ecosystem.

[Bax et al 2016 in Conservation Biology](#)

- Article on Results of Efforts Under the CBD to Describe EBSAs
- Provides an update on the EBSA work and characterizes different types of EBSAs described

[Compilation of Experiences and Lessons Learned from Scientific Methodologies and Approaches for the Description of Areas Meeting the EBSA Criteria](#)

- SBSTTA information document

Other resources are available on [the CBDs EBSA website](#).