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CCAMLR MPAs and the global climate and biodiversity crisis

Submitted by ASOC



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CCAMLR MPAs and the global climate and biodiversity crisis

Submitted by ASOC¹

Abstract

The world is in a global climate and biodiversity crisis. Multiple international targets call for a global network of MPAs to curb biodiversity loss, and both the first and second CCAMLR Performance Review Panels (2008 and 2017, respectively) made recommendations for CCAMLR to advance its MPA work. Nearly two decades since MPA discussions began, there are significant gaps in the system of CCAMLR MPAs. This has implications not only for the conservation of marine life in the Convention Area but also in addressing the global climate and biodiversity crisis. ASOC calls on CCAMLR to realize the bulk of a representative system of MPAs by 2020, specifically recommending that CCAMLR:

1. Acknowledges the climate and biodiversity crisis and commits to adopting well-designed robust MPAs which have no duration and significant no-take regions.
2. Adopts the EAMPA proposal without a duration now, including MacRobertson, Drygalski and D'Urville Sea-Mertz areas.
3. Adopts Phase 1 of the WSMMPA in 2019, and adopts Phase 2 no later than 2023. Neither Phase 1 or Phase 2 should have a duration.
4. Adopts a D1MPA with without a duration in 2019, including the extension of no-take zones to all areas previously identified as critical to ensure conservation objectives are met.
5. Develops MPAs in un-represented regions of the Convention Area, including Domain 9.

Climate and biodiversity crisis

The world is in a global climate and biodiversity crisis.² Earlier this year, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report declared that the world's ecosystems, across land and ocean, are deteriorating and biodiversity is in rapid decline, leaving humanity at severe risk due to the loss of ecosystem services. The report also declared that drivers of change have accelerated and that climate change is exacerbating all other drivers, increasing the impacts on global ecosystems and human well-being. It highlighted that a solution to curbing biodiversity loss, especially in the face of climate change induced loss, is expanding the global network of protected areas.

Protected oceans are more resilient and are in better condition to mitigate against climate change.³ Many countries (146 states throughout the world) have established marine protected areas (MPAs) as the core tool for management, with increasing frequency and scale.⁴ The evidence shows that MPAs, especially no-take marine reserves, lead to increases in biomass and biodiversity while also enhancing resilience to environmental impacts, including climate change.⁵ In the Southern Ocean, MPAs are a significant tool for conserving marine ecosystems, especially in the face of climate change.

Multiple international targets call for a global network of MPAs to curb biodiversity loss. These include the World Summit on Sustainable Development goals, Aichi Biodiversity Targets, IUCN recommendations, and the United Nations Sustainable Development goals. These targets call for a range from 10 percent to at least 30 percent of the ocean globally to be protected in an ecologically

¹ Lead author Ricardo Roura with contributions from Olive Andrews, Claire Christian, Mike Walker, Barry Weeber, Rodolfo Werner and WWF.

² IPBES (2019); IPCC (2018).

³ Roberts et al (2017).

⁴ Mori and Andrews (2016).

⁵ Among recent studies see, e.g., Topor et al. (2019); Walsworth et al. (2019); Laffoley et al. (2019) and Magris et al. (2018).

representative network of MPAs by 2020. Recent studies and initiatives, however, have pointed to the need for more than 30%, perhaps as high as 50%.⁶

CCAMLR is responsible for conserving marine life in approximately 10% of the global ocean as articulated in Articles I and II of the Convention. These responsibilities are detailed in Article IX of the CAMLR Convention and include “the designation of the opening and closing of areas, regions or sub-regions for purposes of scientific study or conservation, including special areas for protection and scientific study”.⁷ In 2009, and in line with global targets, the CAMLR Commission committed to establish a representative system (or network) of MPAs by 2012. Discussions on this had begun almost a decade earlier.

In this paper we evaluate the progress CCAMLR has made in realizing a representative system of MPAs in the Convention Area in the context of the global climate and biodiversity crisis.

The current situation of CCAMLR MPAs

In 2009, CCAMLR adopted an MPA in the South Orkney Islands southern shelf (Domain 1) and commented that the designation was “...a substantial achievement and confirmed CCAMLR’s innovative and global leadership in the conservation of marine living resources.”⁸ In 2016 CCAMLR adopted a large-scale MPA in the Ross Sea region (Domain 8), progressing in its commitment towards a system (Figure 1).

Several additional MPA proposals – in East Antarctica (Domain 7), Weddell Sea (Domain 3), and the NW Antarctic Peninsula (Domain 1) (Figure 1) – are being considered for adoption by CCAMLR. These would move CCAMLR closer to realizing a representative system of MPAs, and thus towards curbing or preventing biodiversity loss in the Southern Ocean. It would also meet objectives related to ecosystem protection, research and climate change identified by CCAMLR in CM 91-04 as well as the objectives of Articles I and II of the CAMLR Convention.

To date there are no concrete CCAMLR proposals for other planning domains, though a future proposal for Domain 4 has been announced.⁹ Some CCAMLR Members have implemented marine spatial protection areas north of 60° south but these have not been considered by CCAMLR and are not CCAMLR MPAs.

Since all CCAMLR Members have the same rights and responsibilities regarding the conservation of marine life under the CAMLR Convention, each Member should contribute to achieving the Commission’s commitment to MPAs. It follows that it is up to all Members to take the necessary steps to resolve this situation as a matter of urgency.

⁶ See e.g., O’Leary, et al. (2016); Wilson (2016).

⁷ CCAMLR Convention Art. IX(2)(g).

⁸ CCAMLR XVII para. 7.2.

⁹ CCAMLR-38/23, page 2: “WSMPA Phase 2 will extend the Weddell Sea Marine Protected Area [WSMPA Phase 1] across the Domain 4 region and will be submitted to the Commission by 2022/23.”

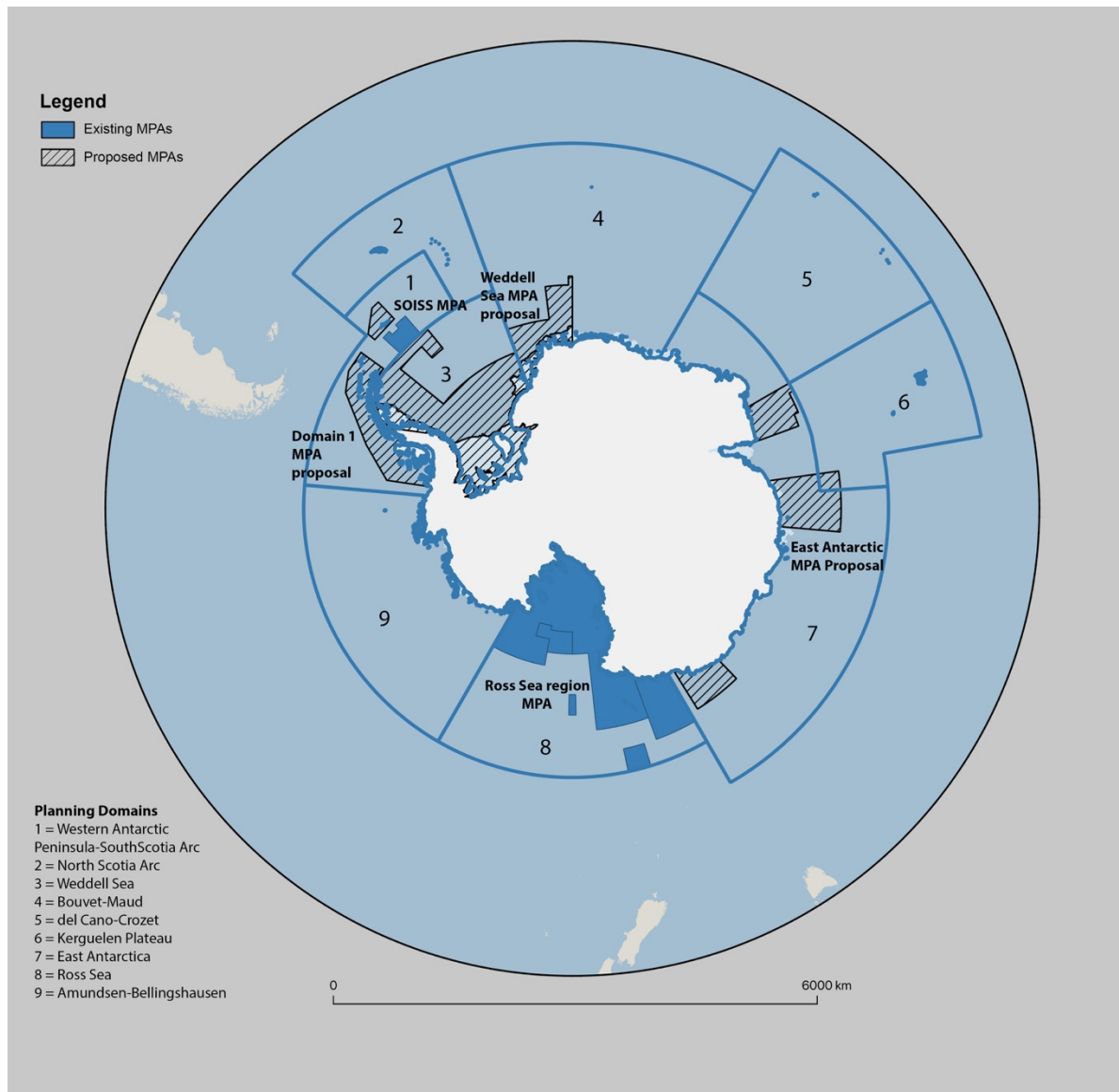


Figure 1. CCAMLR's MPA planning domains, MPAs and proposals. Existing MPAs (South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf, SOISS and Ross Sea region) shown in blue. Proposals for MPAs (Domain 1, Weddell Sea and East Antarctic) shown by hashed lines. MPA planning domains illustrated by numbers 1-9.

The world is watching

The progress CCAMLR has made to establish high seas MPAs has failed to match its own ambition and stated commitments, or to respond adequately to the global climate and biodiversity crisis. Both the first and second CCAMLR Performance Reviews (2008 and 2017, respectively) considered the extent to which CCAMLR had made progress to establish a representative system of MPAs. While the Review Panels commended CCAMLR's efforts, they remarked first on an apparent loss of momentum resulting in an unclear time table for conducting this work, and – nine years later – noted that CCAMLR had come under criticism for the rate at which it was able to complete work on MPA designations.¹⁰ Both Review Panels made recommendations for CCAMLR to advance its MPA work.

Prolonged negotiations, conservation compromises justified on the pretense of science, and the slow pace of progress on MPA adoption bring into question CCAMLR's credibility. For example, several

¹⁰ CCAMLR Performance Review Report, 1 September 2008, paras. 17-21 and Recommendations; CCAMLR Performance Review Panel (2017). Second Performance Review of CCAMLR - Final Report of the Panel. CCAMLR-XXXVI/01. Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, CCAMLR. Para 33 (iii).

MPAs were completely removed, split, or otherwise weakened from each of the past or current MPA proposals despite the strong science underlying the original proposals. Another approach has been to include – as part of an MPA proposal – fisheries zones that are managed primarily through existing Conservation Measures for fisheries, rather than through measures emerging from the MPA itself. This approach adds limited conservation value with respect to the pre-MPA situation and establishes a poor precedent for subsequent proposals. Furthermore, the most recent CCAMLR Performance Review noted that:

“Set against a broad range of studies, which show that for MPAs to be effective, they need to be of long duration and have significant no-take zones, the fact that the Ross Sea region MPA expires after 35 years (which is shorter than the life histories of many birds, mammals and fish that the MPA sets out to protect) **raises the question as to the extent to which CCAMLR is in line with MPA best-practices** [emphasis ours]. Current and future CCAMLR MPAs would benefit from having durations at least in alignment with the species and ecosystem processes the MPA sets out to protect and in having meaningful no-take zones.”¹¹

The Southern Ocean is intimately connected with processes affecting the whole planet.¹² CCAMLR’s MPA system is far from representative.¹³ Adopting the current MPA proposals without delay or further dilution would begin to improve CCAMLR’s track record on this matter.

Closing remarks and recommendations

Marine protection is not something that can be addressed only after fisheries have been established if we are to protect the long-term health of ocean ecosystems. Nearly two decades since MPA discussions began, there are significant gaps in the system of CCAMLR MPAs, questioning CCAMLR’s “...innovative and global leadership in the conservation of marine living resources in the Southern Ocean”. CCAMLR’s failure to date to meet its commitment to MPAs has implications not only for the conservation of marine life in the Convention Area but also in addressing the global climate and biodiversity crisis. This needs to be reversed without delay or obfuscation.

ASOC calls on CCAMLR to realize the bulk of a representative system of MPAs by 2020, taking into consideration the advice of CCAMLR’s second Performance Review, specifically:

1. Acknowledges the climate and biodiversity crisis and commits to adopting well-designed robust MPAs which have no duration and significant no-take regions.
2. Adopts the EAMPA proposal without a duration now, including MacRobertson, Drygalski and D’Urville Sea-Mertz areas.
3. Adopts Phase 1 of the WSMPA in 2019, and adopts Phase 2 no later than 2023. Neither Phase 1 or Phase 2 should have a duration.
4. Adopts a D1MPA with without a duration in 2019, including the extension of no-take zones to all areas previously identified as critical to ensure conservation objectives are met.
5. Develops MPAs in un-represented regions of the Convention Area, including Domain 9.

¹¹ CCAMLR-XXXVI/01. Para 33 (iii).

¹² See e.g. Aronson et al 2011; Atkinson et al 2019.

¹³ Welsford 2018; Brooks et al 2018.

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