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Rising to the challenge: maintaining CCAMLR's focus on marine protected areas

Submitted by ASOC



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Rising to the challenge: maintaining CCAMLR's focus on marine protected areas **Submitted by ASOC**

Abstract

2020 marks the deadline for global leaders to reach marine conservation targets agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ASOC strongly believes that for too long CCAMLR has failed to act decisively in the face of the climate and biodiversity crisis, and that this year the need and opportunity to act are critical. ASOC recommends that CCAMLR, at this year's meeting:

1. Adopt the East Antarctic MPA (EAMPA) with no limit to its duration, incorporating all three proposed areas (MacRobertson, Drygalski and D'Urville Sea-Mertz).
2. Adopt Phase 1 of the Weddell Sea MPA (WSMPA) and work towards adopting Phase 2 no later than 2023. Neither Phase 1 nor Phase 2 should have a limit to their duration.
3. Adopt the Domain 1 MPA (D1MPA), with no limit to its duration, including the extension of no-take zones to all areas previously identified as critical, such as the areas around Elephant Island, to ensure conservation objectives are met.
4. Continue work to establish a representative system of comprehensive, adequate and representative MPAs, with significant no-take areas and no limits to their duration, across all planning domains.

Introduction

2020 marks the deadline for global leaders to reach conservation targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Aichi Target 11) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Target 14.5). Both agreements aim to protect 10% of the world's coastal and marine waters in effectively managed, ecologically representative, and well-connected systems of protected areas.¹

CCAMLR Members have an extraordinary opportunity to significantly contribute to global efforts to protect 10% of the global ocean by the end of 2020 and to make progress towards CCAMLR's objective of creating a representative system of MPAs by adopting the three MPA proposals under consideration. Designation of the East Antarctic, Weddell Sea, and Antarctic Peninsula MPAs in 2020 would represent the largest act of marine protection in history.

CCAMLR committed to establishing a representative system of MPAs by 2012.² To date it has adopted only two: the Ross Sea Region and the South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf MPAs. CCAMLR Members have an obligation to meet the commitments they have made under Article II of the CAMLR Convention to conserve Antarctic marine life.³ The designation of MPAs is fully consistent with CCAMLR's mandate including the provisions of Article II and Article IX 2(g).

MPAs are an effective tool for marine conservation; protecting and restoring habitats and species, building resilience against climate change and providing scientific reference areas to study the impacts of climate change and fisheries (IUCN WCPA, 2018; Laffoley et al., 2019; Magris et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2017; Walsworth et al., 2019). Scientific evidence recommends full protection of at least 30% of bioregions to reverse existing adverse impacts, increase resilience to climate change, and sustain long-term regional and global ocean health (O'Leary et al., 2016). International efforts to achieve this target

¹ Convention on Biological Diversity. 2012. *CBD Target 11* [viewed 20/01/2020] <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rational/target-11/>, and United Nations. 2015. *The UN Sustainable Development Goals, Target 14, Life Below Water* [viewed 20/01/2020] <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/oceans/>

² CCAMLR XXVIII Report, paragraph 7.19.

³ The CAMLR Convention defines conservation to include rational use and requires any harvesting and associated activities to be undertaken in accordance with three principles of conservation.

are already underway, with the IUCN World Conservation Congress calling for at least 30% of each marine habitat to be fully protected in networks of MPAs by 2030 (IUCN, 2016).

The current global climate and biodiversity crisis (IPBES 2019, IPCC 2019) further strengthens the need for CCAMLR to take urgent action on this issue (ASOC, 2019). Antarctica is one of the fastest warming regions on the planet, with changing temperatures impacting key habitats, such as ice shelves (Lai et al., 2020), which is in turn negatively impacting key species such as Antarctic krill (Veytia et al., 2020) with flow-on implications for entire Southern Ocean ecosystems. The establishment of large MPAs, together with CCAMLR's ecosystem-based and precautionary approach, provides an opportunity to improve ocean resilience to the impacts of climate change (Reid 2018). In 2019 the Science20 (S20) group of scientists, comprised of the heads of national academies of science of the G20, including many CCAMLR Members, endorsed fully protected MPAs as an important tool to protect ocean ecosystems and enhance climate resilience (Science20, 2019).⁴

Progress towards a representative system of MPAs

Three MPA proposals have been proposed to CCAMLR for adoption this year: The East Antarctic MPA (969,000 km²); the Weddell Sea MPA (1,968,175 km²); and the Domain 1 MPA covering the Antarctic Peninsula and Scotia Sea (670,877 km²).

A fundamental objective of a comprehensive, adequate and representative approach to conservation is to ensure examples of the full range of ecosystems are protected within and across all bioregions (Fitzsimmons & Wescott, 2016). The areas chosen should also be characteristic of the ecosystems they are designed to represent. A standard way of evaluating representativeness is to determine the coverage of ecoregions in the protected areas.

Scientists have previously identified 23 distinct benthic ecoregions and 19 pelagic ecoregions in the Southern Ocean. These ecoregions were used in a recent analysis of current MPAs in the Southern Ocean (Brooks et al., 2020). This analysis found that within current MPAs, including those within national jurisdictions, 6 out of 23 benthic ecoregions have 10% or more of their area protected and only 2 benthic ecoregions have 30% in no-take areas (Brooks et al., 2020). Further, only 7 out of 19 pelagic ecoregions have 10% of their area protected and only 2 of 19 pelagic ecoregions have 30% protected in no-take areas (Brooks et al., 2020). If all three current MPA proposals were designated, 12 of 23 benthic ecoregions and 13 of 19 pelagic ecoregions would have 30% or more of their total area protected, though not all in no-take areas (Brooks et al., 2020). CCAMLR has a long way to go to achieve a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of MPAs.

CCAMLR's challenges in establishing MPAs

Despite agreement among CCAMLR Members to establish a system of MPAs and the adoption of Conservation Measure 91-04, discussions have been unnecessarily drawn out over many years (Brooks et al, 2020; Jacquet et al, 2016; Petrov & Kasatkina, 2019; Tang et al, 2020).⁵ Nearly two decades since MPA discussions began at CCAMLR, and despite the considerable effort by many CCAMLR Members, little progress has been achieved to realize a representative system of MPAs that meets the ecosystem protection, scientific research, and climate change objectives of the General framework for the establishment of CCAMLR MPAs (CM 91-04).

⁴ "Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are a powerful but underutilized tool to help protect ocean ecosystems and ensure sustainable development (e.g. through the Aichi and SDG targets). International and interdisciplinary efforts are needed to better understand and incorporate use of MPAs – especially fully and highly protected areas that permit none or minimal extractive activity – into climate change mitigation and adaptation planning, fishery management, and marine spatial planning." Endorsed by the Presidents of the Academy of Sciences of, inter alia, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, UK and USA, 6 March 2019.

⁵ For examples see the discussions from 2012 in the SC-CAMLR-XXXI Report, paragraphs 5.21-5.30 and from 2014 in the SC-CAMLRXXXIII Report, paragraphs 5.11-5.45, among others.

Proponents of MPAs have considered and addressed feedback received from Members and revised MPA proposals. The East Antarctic MPA (EAMPA) proposal has been endorsed multiple times by the Scientific Committee and discussed by the Commission over the last 9 years. It has gone through a number of reductions and iterations to take into account the issues raised by Members. There is no reason for this MPA not to be adopted this year. The Weddell Sea and Domain 1 MPAs have also been considered and revised to accommodate Members' feedback.

Numerous databases, peer-reviewed articles, working papers, and meeting reports support each MPA proposal. The case for establishing CCAMLR MPAs is strongly supported by the best available science, as required by the CAMLR Convention. CCAMLR is charged with conservation of 10% of the global ocean. Additionally, the Convention requires action to prevent harm in accordance with its three conservation principles.⁶ Thus, during negotiations Members should ensure that CCAMLR is able to act in accordance to the best available science and its conservation mandate.

Conclusion and recommendations

At the time of writing, the 39th annual meeting of CCAMLR is being planned as a virtual meeting due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite such necessary restrictions, CCAMLR Members can adopt MPAs at this year's meeting, as long as they are prepared to negotiate in good faith and compromise. Antarctica is warming rapidly, with impacts on key habitats and species, and with important ecosystem-wide implications. ASOC urges CCAMLR Members to be world leaders on marine protection and to rise to the challenge of designating MPAs. ASOC recommends that CCAMLR, at this year's meeting:

1. Adopt the East Antarctic MPA (EAMPA) with no limit to its duration, incorporating all three proposed areas (MacRobertson, Drygalski and D'Urville Sea-Mertz).
2. Adopt Phase 1 of the Weddell Sea MPA (WSMPA) and work towards adopting Phase 2 no later than 2023. Neither Phase 1 nor Phase 2 should have a limit to their duration.
3. Adopt the Domain 1 MPA (D1MPA), with no limit to its duration, including the extension of no-take zones to all areas previously identified as critical, such as the areas around Elephant Island, to ensure conservation objectives are met.
4. Continue work to establish a representative system of comprehensive, adequate and representative MPAs, with significant no-take areas and no limits to their duration, across all planning domains in the Convention Area including Domain 9, the corridor connecting Sub-Antarctic islands in Domains 4, 5 and 6, and the additional four zones within the original East Antarctic MPA proposal.

⁶ The principles outlined in Article II (3) can be summarized as: protect the stable recruitment of target species; maintain ecological relationships between species; and prevent long-term and irreversible ecosystem changes.

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