



MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTED AREAS TASK FORCE



IMMA Extraordinary Workshop for the Mediterranean Monk Seal

La Spezia, Italy, 5 April 2018

Preliminary Report of the Workshop

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Please note that at the completion of the IMMA review process by end of 2018, the Final Report of the Workshop will be issued, superseding this Preliminary Report. The Final Report, along with maps and IMMA background data, will be available for download on the IMMA website: marinemammalhabitat.org.

Executive summary

On 5 April 2018, the IMMA Extraordinary Workshop for the Mediterranean Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*) was held in La Spezia, Italy, with the objective to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas — IMMAs for the entire range of this species. Starting with 26 initial Areas of Interest (AoI), including those AoI submitted before the meeting, and building on the existing monk seal IMMAs that were identified at the Mediterranean IMMA Workshop in Chania, Greece, in October 2016, three substantial new candidate IMMAs (cIMMAs) were identified and proposed utilizing the selection criteria. The AoI and cIMMAs included sites for endangered monk seals in Greece and Italy in the Mediterranean as well as the other two known subpopulations living in the eastern Atlantic, around the Madeira Archipelago (Portugal), and at Cabo Blanco (Mauritania and Western Sahara). AoI were also considered in the southeastern Mediterranean and across North Africa. This IMMA Extraordinary Workshop completes the current picture on monk seals, following the previous Mediterranean IMMA Workshop (October 2016) and the Pacific Islands IMMA Workshop (March 2017) that identified habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*).

The IMMA Extraordinary Workshop for the Mediterranean Monk Seal brought together 10 experts from Greece, Italy, Portugal (Madeira), Spain and the UK, and a number of others were consulted by email. After completion of the submission forms, the new candidate IMMAs will go to the independent reviewers for assessment and potential approval as IMMAs. They will then be entered on the IMMA e-Atlas at marinemammalhabitat.org.

The workshop was organised by the Task Force with support from the MAVA Foundation. Cooperating organisations included Tethys Research Institute, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, GOBI and the Eulabor Institute.

Background

The IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force

The Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) initiative, developed by the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force (IUCN-MMPATF or 'Task Force'), is modelled on the successful example of the BirdLife International process for determining 'Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas' (IBAs). The intention is that the identification of IMMAs through a consistent expert process, independent of any political and socio-economic concerns, will provide valuable input of marine mammals into existing national and international conservation tools with respect to marine habitats. These tools include Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); Key Biodiversity Area (KBAs) identified through the IUCN Standard; as well as marine protected areas (MPAs), marine spatial planning (MSP), and shipping directives through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Purpose of the IMMA Extraordinary Workshop

The aim of the IMMA Extraordinary Workshop for the Mediterranean Monk Seal was to identify discrete habitat areas - important for the Mediterranean monk seal – that have the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation. This workshop, in follow up to the IMMA Regional Workshop for the Mediterranean Sea (October 2016), employed an expert-based process utilizing selection criteria devised by the Task Force, in consultation with the marine mammal science and conservation community. The one-day workshop also included consultation with experts on the Areas of Interest (AoI) and on the selection of candidate IMMAs (cIMMAs) across the species range, as well as recommendations on how to address some of the primary conservation concerns through the identification of IMMAs and appropriate conservation tools.

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by Erich Hoyt with assistance from Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, Michael Tetley and Simone Panigada. The workshop was organised by the Task Force with support from the MAVA Foundation. Cooperating organisations included Tethys Research Institute, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, GOBI and the Eulabor Institute. The Task Force is grateful to all the participants listed in Annex 1, and to Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa and others who cooperated by submitting additional AoI.

Report of the Workshop

The **IMMA Extraordinary Workshop for the Mediterranean Monk Seal** took place from 9:00 to 16:00 on 5 April 2018, hosted by Confindustria in via Don Minzoni 1, La Spezia, Italy.

Erich Hoyt, Co-chair of the IUCN SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, opened the meeting and welcomed participants. He talked about previous workshops that had identified IMMAs for Mediterranean monk seals (2016) and Hawaiian monk seals (Pacific Islands, 2017) and remarked that this workshop offered the chance to complete the monk seal picture in the Mediterranean and with the two subpopulations found in the eastern Atlantic off West Africa.

Given the small number of participants—ten experts from Greece, Italy, Portugal (Madeira), Spain and the UK (see Annex 1), it was decided to keep the meeting informal: no officers were elected, and no formal presentations were given. Hoyt offered the floor to Michael Tetley who managed the discussion.

Tetley gave a short informal presentation talking about the Task Force, IMMAs, and the IMMA process and results to date. Tetley presented the situation with the Mediterranean monk seal as it was treated during the Mediterranean IMMA Workshop in Chania, Greece, in October 2016. A number of cIMMAs were identified then, and also some AoI. The workshop briefly discussed those. It was decided to seize the opportunity of the presence of additional monk seal experts from Greece, namely from the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal (MOM) and in particular, Alexandros Karamanlidis, for updating the Mediterranean IMMAs but also to discuss AoI proposed from the two eastern Atlantic sites which could become cIMMAs, thereby completing IMMA identification for the entire species.

Tetley showed the maps of AoI, cIMMAs and IMMAs from the previous workshop. It became apparent that the Egadi Islands in Italy, which had been included as an AoI, in the light of recent observations, deserved consideration as a candidate IMMA (cIMMA). A decision was made to contact the Egadi Islands MPA director Stefano Donati and researcher Giulia Mo, who has worked with Mediterranean monk seals at this site, to see if this AoI should be proposed as a cIMMA or remain an AoI.

A two-week deadline was given for final commitment to the submission of new cIMMA proposals.

The workshop also discussed a number of general issues regarding monk seals with the conclusions that:

- The presence of caves or former habitat is not necessarily a good predictor of monk seal presence.
- The 200m depth contour which was formerly used for defining the typical extent of Mediterranean monk seal distribution is less used now than ten years ago. In areas with steep drop off such as southern Crete, 200m would confine the seals to a narrow extent. Some monk seals are being found beyond this depth, and in some cases far beyond. In sum, Karamanlidis believed that they were going beyond 200m depth but could not quantify the spatial or temporal extent of such wider occurrence.
- There is genetic differentiation between the various subpopulations of Mediterranean monk seals, including those in the Atlantic off West Africa, but to date no separation of this species has been suggested taxonomically.

After the morning coffee break, Tetley turned the meeting's attention to the Atlantic. First he presented an AoI in Madeira and the nearby Desertas Islands (Portugal). Luis Freitas from Madeira talked about the decision to make one IMMA for the distribution of the species in Madeira and the Desertas Islands. There was some discussion as to whether these should be two separate IMMAs but the group agreed to put this forward as a cIMMA, subject to the forms being completed.

The second Atlantic AoI to be presented was for monk seals living in a colony in Cabo Blanco, along the border of Mauritania and Western Sahara. This had been submitted by Pablo Fernández de Larrinoa. After a brief discussion, the group agreed that this should be submitted as a cIMMA, but to ask for expanded text to qualify the boundaries that had been suggested.

Next, Tetley introduced southern Turkey and northern Cyprus. The Turkish part had been presented by Ayaka Amaha Oztürk based on knowledge and consultations with various Turkish researchers. There were four existing IMMA areas here, but it was noted that without Turkish researchers in the room, there would need to be further consultation on any additional enrichment or further expansion of these areas, either in the next weeks or when things would be reviewed again as part of a planned IMMA review process in 6 to 10 years.

The group next tackled Greece, which had a submission from Alexandros Karamanlidis, who proposed consideration of a wider Hellenic IMMA throughout the Ionian and Aegean regions (combining four existing IMMA areas for Mediterranean monk seals). In Chania, Greece, in October 2016, Karamanlidis was not present when the four smaller cIMMAs had been made in Greek waters by other participants.

A long, but germane and productive discussion ensued leading up to and carrying on after lunch regarding the best way to describe the monk seals in Greek waters: whether as one large cIMMA, a set of polygons making up one large discontinuous cIMMA, or numerous smaller cIMMAs. The solution adopted in Hawaiian waters, agreed with the independent reviewers, was two IMMAs, each with several polygons representing the habitat around each island, and then with these polygons surrounded by a buffer zone to make up the discontinuous IMMA plus buffer.

One dilemma was that an IMMA border must be biocentric and Karamanlidis's proposal had not included Turkish waters. The group noted again that no Turkish colleagues were present and added that there were marine border disagreements. It was proposed that the cIMMA border could coincide with the IUCN range map border along western Turkey, but be cut off when it extended to southern Turkey. Tetley, drawing upon the definition of IMMAs as identifying 'discrete' areas, wondered if the group could draw a finer boundary which was focused more towards known habitat use, following IMMA selection criteria, rather than merely the known range of the species.

The group then considered that monk seals were crossing large areas, though the evidence was not well supported for Greek waters. Karamanlidis noted that most of the islands were close together. Manel Gazo said that this risked betraying the spirit of the IMMAs if we included all the area that focuses not only on habitat but on range as interpreted by IUCN. It was noted that the scale of the IMMAs for monk seals was much smaller for Madeira, Cabo Blanco and other sites. Eventually, the group leaned toward one IMMA with discontinuous areas, although there was still confusion about what this would mean, especially in terms of what may be discrete when related to adjoining areas within Turkish waters (i.e. in the Levantine Sea or the Sea of Marmara).

Should IMMAs give special attention to pupping areas? Tetley showed Karamanlidis's pupping map. The experts agreed that it would be good to spotlight pupping areas perhaps through additional maps provided as part of the submission (noting that these areas appear more explicitly discrete than the overall distribution of the Mediterranean monk seal). It could also be that special attention may be given to these areas in terms of text added to the IMMA Guidance document. It was agreed that Madeira and Cabo Blanco could, if appropriate information were available, also provide pupping area maps similar to the Hellenic example.

After much exploration of possible scenarios, during which Tetley showed a wide variety of mapping options, it was decided that for Greek waters, the cIMMA put forward would consist of one IMMA covering discontinuous areas, similar to the way it had been handled in the Hawaiian Islands with Hawaiian monk seals.

It was reiterated that the IMMA Secretariat should contact Turkish researchers and explain the situation, also indicating that in some cases for existing monk seal IMMAs in the Aegean that they were transboundary between Greek and Turkish waters. This could give credence to the idea that the wider Hellenic cIMMA in Greek waters should extend to similar, adjacent Turkish waters in the Aegean. It was pointed out that monk seals also lived in the western part of the Marmara Sea, and that this should also be explored as another potential cIMMA or AoI unit.

The name for the large cIMMA proposal from Greece and Turkey would, for the short term, remain as that originally submitted (i.e. Hellenic cIMMA) but that during review a more appropriate title would be explored which reflected the transboundary adjoining areas in the North East Mediterranean. Tetley asked if Karamanlidis could summarize the process of determining the cIMMA to communicate it to the independent reviewers, including how the cIMMA was determined and the justification of the buffer zone and outer boundary.

The group next considered the remaining AoI from the eastern Mediterranean, located in Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Croatia and Morocco. Most were kept as AoI without sufficient evidence to make cIMMA proposals. However, at Al Hoceima in Morocco the monk seal AoI was removed. It was decided to set a precedent here for actions that could be taken by a workshop to update previous work. It was suggested that a timely deadline could be given to the original proposer of an AoI, in this case Al Hoceima, to show evidence that would qualify that it could remain as an AoI agreed through a workshop.

In summary, the group started with 26 initial Areas of Interest (AoI), including those AoI and cIMMA submitted before the meeting, and building on the monk seal IMMAs that were identified at the Mediterranean IMMA Workshop in Chania, Greece, in October 2016. In total three substantial new cIMMAs were identified, each one proposed through the expert-based process, utilizing the selection criteria. The cIMMAs and AoI included sites for endangered monk seals in Greece and Italy in the Mediterranean as well as two known subpopulations living off Africa in the eastern Atlantic, around the Madeira Archipelago in Portugal, and at Cabo Blanco in Mauritania/Western Sahara. AoI were also considered in the southeastern Mediterranean and across North Africa.

This IMMA Extraordinary Workshop thus completes the current picture on monk seals, following the previous Mediterranean IMMA Workshop and the March 2017 Pacific Islands IMMA Workshop that identified habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*).

After the last coffee break, there was a short discussion about the need for more data to inform the process of using habitat features to qualify as part of cIMMAs, or even AoI, and

to determine how they should be treated. These habitat features include not only caves, but seagrass for dugong and seamounts for humpback and other whales and dolphins. It was recommended that information and useful considerations should be put into the IMMA Guidance to suggest how to consider habitat types in the selection of AoI and cIMMAs. In previous workshops, this had already been an issue with the historic whaling data (logbook data pre-1910) indicating the importance of former habitats. Recognizing habitat types even in the absence of marine mammal sightings could be valuable for various species. Hoyt said that for species that had been extirpated from an area suspected as important habitat, it could be useful to compare maps, especially in the cases where Steller's sea lions or other sea lions, sea otters and humpback whales had apparently expanded their ranges in recent years. Were they returning to the same areas where they had previously lived? Would doing these comparisons help to give us predictive ability?

Finally, there was a discussion about the AoI process. It was meant to be an ongoing process, with anyone able to submit an AoI but that they would only be considered during official IMMA workshops. More guidance was needed about the role of the Regional Groups in terms of the AoI process and the protocols of how the workshops decide about AoI, especially when they come to revisit an area. It was suggested that a system could be implemented, potentially through the marinemammalhabitat.org website, which could be expanded to allow submissions of new AoI information which the regional coordinators could then assess and use even outside of the workshops. The Task Force co-chairs both acknowledged that work would need to be done to expand the remit of the AoI.

The workshop experts were thanked for their help, and the meeting concluded.

Annex 1. Participants

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Annex 2. Workshop Agenda

April 5th 2018

- 9:00 Arrival and Welcome to the Venue
- 09:00 – 9:30 Introduction to the IMMA Extraordinary Workshop for the Mediterranean monk seal
- Welcoming addresses
- [Welcoming Address by Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara and Erich Hoyt, Co-chairs, IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force](#)
- Participant introductions, adoption of the agenda, explanation of the programme
 - Adoption of Agenda and Workshop Chair
- 09:30 – 10:30 Introduction to Important Marine Mammal Areas
- IMMA Selection Criteria, Identification Process, and Areas of Interest (Aoi) for Mediterranean monk seal
- [Presentation by Michael Tetley, IMMA Programme Coordinator, IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force](#)
- Question and Answer Session
 - Proposal of additional Aoi for Mediterranean monk seal
- 10:30 – 11:00 Morning Coffee Break
- 11:00 – 12:00 candidate IMMA (cIMMA) proposals by workshop experts
- Examination of cIMMA proposals and supporting evidence
 - Agreement of cIMMA submission List
- 12:00 – 13:30 Lunch
- 13:30 – 15:30 Drafting Session of expert cIMMA Submissions
- Completion of cIMMA Review Templates
- 15:30 – 16:00 Afternoon Coffee Break
- 16:00 – 17:00 Outstanding issues related to Mediterranean monk seal IMMAs, cIMMA, and Aoi list for Mediterranean monk seal
- Agreement of IMMA, cIMMA and Aoi List
 - Conservation concerns for Mediterranean monk seal place-based conservation
- 17:00 Concluding Remarks and Workshop Close