



Regional Groups Report

2021

Task 1: Assemble the regional group by co-opting and involving the region's marine mammal place-based conservation experts, covering all relevant species, subregions and other aspects as needed (MPA and MSP experts, various threat experts, etc.), and maintain the group's membership list (names, contact details and specialties)

Mediterranean	The group's membership list is updated and emails are sent to advertise new initiatives, reports or activities related to the MMPA Task Force.
Pacific Islands	The group membership has undergone change as people have moved to new roles. We have recently updated the contacts and will continue to send MMPA - IMMA information and other updates.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Membership list is updated, and communications primarily through regular informal engagements via WhatsApp group. Maintenance of list of members and associated details ongoing.
Extended Southern Ocean	The group's membership list is updated. The coordinator for the Extended Southern Ocean was on maternity leave for most of 2021 and only few emails were sent to advertise new initiatives, reports or activities related to the MMPA Task Force.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	A google group is established with 34 members. Emails are sent every few months with updates related to IMMAs and activities of the MMPATF.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	The region's membership list has been maintained, with communications related to the MMPA Task Force increasingly being streamlined.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	The group's membership list is updated and emails are sent to advertise new initiatives, reports or activities related to the MMPA Task Force.
Caspian Sea	Organized in 2021, the Caspian Group is currently comprised of 19 active members from all 5 Caspian countries as well as from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, who have been working in the Caspian Sea for many years (the group's core). The group's core is focused on implementing the strategy of the IUCN Joint SSC-WCPA MMPATF in the Caspian Region. There have been additionally assembled a circulation list for 47 potential members, stakeholders and regional media representatives (names, contact details and specialties), who are also being informed on the MMPA Task Force events and news, on scientific researches conducted by the Caspian Group's members, on projects and news related to Caspian seals and their habitat.

Task 2: Prepare for initial and follow-up regional workshops by encouraging the expert group to submit areas of interest (AoI) and other information under the guidance of the IMMA Coordinator (IMMA Secretariat).

Mediterranean	Bilateral discussions with various interested researchers/groups on potential new science-based information that may be relevant to future IMMAs. Experts encouraged to submit AoI.
Pacific Islands	The Pacific region has been under severe restrictions for the past 2 years. Unfortunately, there has been very little fieldwork to inform new AoI.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Research ongoing to obtain information on new and existing AoI.
Extended Southern Ocean	Discussions to organise a dedicated session at the next SCAR conference to discuss current and future AoI.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	No new AoI have been proposed, however there have been activities within existing AoI to gather data with a view to them transitioning to cIMMA in the future. Specifically at Chagos Archipelago and the Gulf of Aden.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	As the region has been through the process of IMMA/AOI process relatively recently, insufficient new evidence currently exists to submit new IMMA/AOIs. There are no current plans for a follow-up workshop (COVID), but a virtual workshop may be a planned in the future (resources permitting).
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	1st exercise with proposal of pAOI and approval of the IMMAs and pAOI in the region.
Caspian Sea	The Kizlyar Bay, Hirkan and Shirvan AoI identified at IMMA Regional Workshop for the Black Sea, Turkish Straits System and Caspian Sea (February, 2021) are still of great importance. There are not any additional AoI for submitting. Therefore, the Caspian Group will try to find any sources to collect scientific data for justification them as cIMMAs.

Task 3: Assist in logistical and other support for regional IMMA workshops and follow-up actions, such as the drafting and approval of informative factsheets made in collaboration with the IMMA Secretariat.

Mediterranean	Ongoing effort with the IMMA Secretariat
Pacific Islands	Worked with the IMMA Secretariat to contact the country expert to finalise factsheets and/or help finalise them if the original authors were not available.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Provided regional information/ updates to IMMA Co-Chair, Erich Hoyt, for presentation to Ocean Governance Project and paper submission to Frontiers journal.
Extended Southern Ocean	Ongoing effort with the IMMA Secretariat.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	In 2021 factsheets for all the IMMAs in the region were produced in collaboration with PoC and these published online. A webpage dedicated to the IMMA initiative was created under the Resources tab of the Indocet website, with links to each IMMA factsheets.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	Discussions with the the Australian Commonwealth Government are underway to evaluate how IMMAs may inform the update of BIAs (Biological Important Areas). Once this is clear, an infographic information sheet for how IMMAs might be used together with government regulation would be useful to draw up. Currently awaiting the government's advice. Preliminary discussions have been held with the New Zealand Government about how to recognise and give effect to IMMAs in domestic legislation and regulations.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	Assistance in preparation and implementation of the dedicated workshop for this area. Factsheet development involvement following the IMMA workshop. Ongoing effort in case some additions are needed.
Caspian Sea	14 specialists, who would confirm their membership in the Caspian Group later in 2021, prepared submissions of AOs to be considered as cIMMAs at IMMA Regional Workshop for the Black Sea, Turkish Straits System (February, 2021). Under the direction of the IMMA Secretariat, drafts of 3 Caspian IMMA factsheets have been also prepared, approving the final versions with leading Caspian specialists. This work is to be finalised in February, 2022.

Task 4: Support the transition from science to management within IMMAs by addressing consideration and uptake of IMMAs by regional stakeholders, e.g., during relevant marine spatial planning or by examining the need for establishing marine mammal protected areas (MMPAs).

Mediterranean	The IMMA concept has been presented in different occasions and in particular during a dedicated course held in Venice and Thessaloniki in September-November 2021. IMMAs have been considered as case studies and included in a MSP simulation framework. The outcome of the workshop has been distributed online as a massive open online course - MOOC (https://www.marine-ecomed.net/marine-ecomed-mooc/).
Pacific Islands	We promoted IMMAs via an invited talk, video, and poster at the 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas - March 2021. Included IMMAs in the Dugong Action Plan and Whales and Dolphins Action Plan Workshops July - August 2021. Presentation on IMMAs included in the final report of the workshop. In country reminders of IMMAs as a support mechanism for marine protections e.g. from mining interests.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Advocate for recognition of IMMAs led to uptake by Malaysian government agencies on IMMA status in National Policy on Biological Diversity, regional and local area plans, and project-specific Environmental Impact Assessments. Training to improve dolphin watching tourism code of conduct undertaken at Northern Bali IMMA, with participants inclusive of members operating in Savu Sea IMMA.
Extended Southern Ocean	An information document was submitted to the CCAMLR Scientific Committee (SC-CAMLR-40, 11–15 Oct. 2021) by France, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to inform about the results of the IMMA process in the Extended Southern Ocean. This briefing paper is a follow-up to the working paper submitted in 2019 to the CCAMLR Scientific Committee's Working Group on Ecosystem Monitoring and Management (WG-EMM), which presented the scientific protocol for identifying Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs).
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	IMMAs were presented at the Smithsonian Symposium on data sharing in the Arabian region. They were presented to the Department of Fisheries in Somaliland. IMMAs were presented during a workshop dedicated to the Eparses Islands, administrated by TAAF (Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises), for their classification as a National Marine Protected Area, 21 June 2021. Communication about the IMMA of the Mascarene https://charlestelfaircentre.com/the-mascarene-islands-identified-as-an-important-marine-mammal-area/
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	IMMAs have been presented through updates to stakeholders, including government and consultancies. The relevant IMMAs have been recently introduced to draw from in the planning phase of the establishment and design of a marine park in the southwest of Australia, through the Scientific Sector Reference Group. IMMAs are now regularly included for consideration in applications for marine developments as part of New Zealand's resource consenting process.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	The IMMA workshop and results were presented within the CENOBs project final workshops in November 2021, held in Sofia - Bulgaria, hybrid, and also in Romania, during an event dedicated to marine mammals in Romanian waters with Romanian authorities and stakeholders in partnership with the Romanian Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, on October 20, where 74 participants were attending.
Caspian Sea	The outcomes of IMMA Regional Workshop were presented at XI Marine Mammal of the Holarctic International Conference, Conservation Challenges for Land-locked Seals Session (Russia, March 4-5, 2021). The presentation about the IMMA Task Force and 3 Caspian IMMAs was given at the International Webinar "Methods and methodologies for survey and topical issues of the Caspian seal population (<i>Pusa caspica</i>) preservation" (Kazakhstan, August 17-18, 2021). News releases were posted on various websites and social networks and representatives of more than 40 in nine countries.

Task 5: Continue to collect ecological knowledge on the region's marine mammals during the interim period following the initial IMMA workshop, before the eventual follow-up workshop, by providing guidance for the modification of existing IMMAs and/or the submission of new Aol, as appropriate.

Mediterranean	Occasional emails are received from scientists willing to submit new Aol, cIMMAs or with request to update existing information. Specifically, we have received requests for the Gibraltar Strait, Gulf of Taranto and an update on an existing IMMA for monk seals in Cyprus. Feedback, detailing the ongoing process and the need to start planning a second IMMA workshop for the Mediterranean, has been provided, and researchers were encouraged to consider submitting Aols.
Pacific Islands	Some field work as been undertaken. The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme has initiated a Pacific Environment Data Portal https://pacific-data.sprep.org/ to facilitate better access to information. We have requested the Pacific Region IMMAs are on the portal as it continues to be developed.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Papers published relating to IMMAs in the region include: 1. Greg Verutes et al. published a paper on Modeling Seasonal Distribution of Irrawaddy Dolphins in the Kep Archipelago, Vietnam, to help identify areas to target for monitoring and conservation. (https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2021.617921/full). 2. Greg Verutes et al. published a paper on bycatch risks which included Mersing Archipelago IMMA and Kuching Bay IMMA in Malaysia, and Kien Giang and Kep Archipelago in Vietnam (https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0237835). 3. Research commenced on Payar Island and Surrounding Waters Aol. 4. Vivian Kuit et al published a paper on abundance estimates of three cetacean species in the Matang Mangroves and Coastal Waters IMMA (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/aqc.3699). 5. Saliza Bono wrote a short note on spinner dolphin acoustics in northern Straits of Malacca (near Satun-Langkawi IMMA) (https://asa.scitation.org/doi/10.1121/10.0006377). 6. Mustika et al 2021 was published for the Southern Bali IMMA (Mustika, P. L. K., Williams, R., Kadarisman, H. P., Purba, A. O., Maharta, I., Rahmadani, D., ... & Dewantama, I. (2021). A rapid assessment of the marine megafauna biodiversity around South Bali, Indonesia. <i>Frontiers in Marine Science</i> , 8.). 7. Research involving line transect survey, genetic sampling and tagging conducted to contribute to Savu Sea IMMA planning
Extended Southern Ocean	Data are collected and the latest results will be shared and presented during the next SCAR conference during which a working session on IMMA will be planned during the EGBAMM meeting.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	Letter of support provided from the IMMA secretariat for new work in Chagos Aol which resulted in a new large funded marine mammal project. A list of publications from the SWIO region is being updated on a regular basis on the Indocet website.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	IMMAs are now used to provide evidence of important areas in many areas, while recognising with the need for their continued update, including areas with knowledge gaps around them. Researchers are continuing to undertake research in these areas as well as in knowledge gap areas to eventually feed into an updated IMMA/Aol process.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	No additional information was received meanwhile, but is normal since we were in progress of approving the just proposed areas. But the scientist in the area continue the efforts of planning and rolling surveys to monitor the national waters and look for regional opportunities of monitoring.
Caspian Sea	Members of the Caspian Group continue to accumulate monitoring data on the Caspian seal in the existing IMMAs and Aol. In particular, the following expeditions were organised by the Caspian Group's members: an expedition to the Kizlyar Bay and on the coast of the Agrakhanskiy Peninsula (an existing Aol), an expedition to the Samurskiy National Park, Russia (a potential Aol); an expedition to the Zyuydvestovyye Shalyi Islands, Kazakhstan (an existing IMMA); an expedition to the Iranian coast (an existing IMMA). There has not been updated information on the Caspian seal in the Turkmenistan for 10 years. The Caspian Group's members have conducted researches, summarising the recent data in their scientific paper. The data (from 5.1 and 5.2) will be used for creating protected areas within the boundaries of the Caspian Sea IMMAs.

Task 6: Implement, to the extent possible, an early warning system (EWS) to help detect arising changes in the conservation status of the region's marine mammals, warranting management and conservation attention or intervention.

Mediterranean	Ongoing effort with ACCOBAMS in the delineation of Cetacean Critical Habitat is largely based on IMMAs. The idea is to use existing IMMAs and to overlap known and quantifiable anthropogenic threats in order to delineate high risk areas, where suggest and implement appropriate conservation measures. This links also to the recent IUCN Red List assessments for Mediterranean cetaceans.
Pacific Islands	The South Pacific Whale and Dolphin Action Plan is under revision with IMMAs highlighted as a management tool. Identifying and protecting important habitat is a key component. Research in the Kikori Delta IMMA has concerning levels of bycatch in fisheries for swim bladders. Both snubfin and humpback dolphins have been caught in high numbers. Isabel Beasley is working closely with local researchers, government and fishermen to try and reduce the high mortality levels.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Monitoring of any planned development and/ or changes occurring in IMMAs conducted by network members. Among those observed this year include the following: 1. In the Babuyan Marine Corridor IMMA, one of the islands is going to be developed into a SMART city (i.e. hotels, casinos, port, etc.) while the largest off-shore mining operation in the country began in January this year. Dredging has been going on along the coasts since early 2021. 2. In the Iloilo-Guimaras Straits IMMA, although the plan to build the inter-island bridge has been postponed, it has not been cancelled and may still push through. All conservation efforts, particularly the declaration of the site as a protected area for Irrawaddy dolphins is being blocked by the adjacent local governments. The local researcher there had to suspend all research plans for the meantime because of some threats of him being named as persona non grata. A local NGO is still trying to get the papers signed for it to be declared as an MPA. 3. Plans are in place for multiple coastal development projects along the coastline fronting the Mersing Archipelago IMMA.
Extended Southern Ocean	To be discussed during the next SCAR conference during which a working session on IMMA will be planned during the EGBAMM meeting.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	The IMMA regional group in association with the Arabian Sea Whale Network and the Indocet consortium share and disseminate information regarding key developments in the region that may negatively impact marine mammals.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	The community of researchers (including within government departments) in the region are highly active in working towards detecting change where resources are made available. An example of this is the recent up-listing of Australian sea lions in the Australian Commonwealth legislation (EPBC Act) to endangered to match the IUCN. Work in the states' legislation to match this listing is underway. Comparable processes in New Zealand include the regular assessment of the threat status of marine mammals in the region separate to (but often feeding into) the IUCN Red List process.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	Being under ACCOBAMS coverage the insights mentioned for Mediterranean Sea are valid here also.
Caspian Sea	The early warning system (EWS) have not been created for the Caspian Sea. However, discussions about its necessity have been going on for several years at various scientific meetings and seminars.

Task 7: Ensure that the relevant occurrence data deriving from the workshops are contributed to global databases (such as OBIS SEAMAP).

Mediterranean	Several groups in the Mediterranean are contributing to various global or regional databases such as OBIS-SEAMAP and Intercet, and researchers are encouraged to contribute new datasets to such initiatives.
Pacific Islands	We encourage researchers to enter their data into OBIS-SEAMAP. The 'Strandings of Oceania' database (https://pacific-data.sprep.org/dataset/strandings-oceania-database) has been incorporated in the SPREP environment portal. Strandings in New Caledonia are also reported through the Rescue site (rescue.ird.nc). We have submitted stranding report to OBIS-SEAMAP and are encouraging SPREP to use this as their marine mammal reporting tool.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Several groups in the region are contributing to various global or regional databases such as OBIS, CTI, and researchers are encouraged to contribute new datasets to such initiatives.
Extended Southern Ocean	Antarctic scientists are acutely aware of the necessity of making their data publicly available and shareable, following from the requirement of Article III of the Antarctic Treaty. Accordingly, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research houses groups that are dedicated to the proper curation and sharing of data and metadata such as the Standing Committee on Antarctic Data Management or the Expert Group on Antarctic Biodiversity Informatics.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	Several groups in the WIO-AS are contributing to various global or regional databases such as OBIS-SEAMAP and Intercet, and researchers are encouraged to contribute new datasets to such initiatives.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	Researchers are encouraged to contribute new datasets to such global databases. For example, currently plans are being made for such contributions from the southwest Australia region. In addition several baleen whale photo-ID catalogues exist across the region as separate initiatives where such contributions are made to evaluate population sizes, and mixing between populations/subpopulations.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	Several groups in the Black Sea are contributing to various global or regional databases such as OBIS, OBIS-SEAMAP and EMODNET, GBIF, and researchers are encouraged to contribute new datasets to such initiatives.
Caspian Sea	For the reporting period, the Caspian Group has not organised workshops to contribute the relevant occurrence data to global databases (such as OBIS SEAMAP).