



Regional Groups Report

2022

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 being maintained and emails were sent periodically to advertise new initiatives, reports or activities related to the MMPA Task Force.
Pacific Islands	The group membership is reasonably stable with a few changes. We try to maintain the contact list and continue to send MMPA - IMMA information and other updates. Our group acknowledges the death of Mike Donoghue, a key member of our IMMA family.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Research ongoing to obtain information on listed AoI and cIMMAs, to address actions to upgrade to full IMMA status. Conducted review and provided feedback to IMMA Secretariat on IMMA factsheets and e-Atlas.
Extended Southern Ocean	The group's membership has been updated as people have moved to new roles and emails are sent to advertise new initiatives, reports or activities related to the MMPA Task Force.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	A google email group is operational that includes all the scientific experts that participated in the IMMA workshop, plus many other experts from the region that also submitted pAoI. There are 34 members in the group. However, there is little email traffic and the group could be used more actively to pass on information about IMMAs from the Task Force
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	The region's membership list has been maintained, with communications related to the MMPA Task Force.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	The group's membership list is updated and emails are sent to promote new initiatives, reports or activities related to the MMPA Task Force.
Caspian Sea	In 2022, the Caspian Group was joined by a representative of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan. The group's core is currently comprised of 20 active members involved in research, conservation and rehabilitation of the only marine mammal in the Caspian – the Caspian seal. The membership list, including contact details, specialties was regularly updated if necessary. For sharing any news on activities related to the MMPA Task Force, the Caspian Group and scientific, ecological and other events in the Caspian region, a circulation list of 169 specialist was created.
South East Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean	This regional group was established in 2022 following the SETTPO IMMA workshop held in early June in Costa Rica. A membership list was collated based on attendees. Emails were sent afterwards to advertise the final results of the proposed IMMA. Locally, the Mexican coordinators have been in communication with the president of the Mexican Society of Marine Mammalogy to find the best way to assemble the regional group by co-opting and involving the region's marine mammal place-based conservation experts. In Central America, the group keeps in active communication. This has strengthened regional and international collaboration efforts.

Task 2: In concert with the IMMA Secretariat and regional expert group: a) examine current IMMAs and verify that all the information pertaining to them is current or need modification; b) examine current cIMMAs and address actions to award them IMMA status; c) support the drafting and updating of informative factsheets made in collaboration with the IMMA Secretariat; d) in preparation for the successive regional workshop in any particular region, help collecting new pAoI based on proposals by the region group; e) in preparation for the successive regional workshop in any particular region, examine current AoI with a view of awarding them IMMA status.

Mediterranean	Preliminary requests were received by some researchers to update the IMMAs in the Mediterranean, and discussions were held with various interested researchers/groups on potential new science-based information that may have become available and may be relevant to this process. Experts were encouraged to submit pAoI in preparation for future regional workshop.
Pacific Islands	The Pacific region had restrictions on movement in 2022 but travel is now possible thankfully: a) we revised the IMMA information when assessing the IMMA factsheets. Some work has been published which improved our knowledge; b) the co-coordinators are guest editing a 2023 Special Edition of Pacific Conservation Biology to encourage papers that will inform the revision of cIMMAs hopefully to IMMA status; c) we fully supported the fact sheet production; d) no pAoI have been identified due to 3 years of little mobility in the region but we are mindful of these, especially with the rate of ocean change in the Pacific; e) we continue to assess possible research in AoI areas.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	No special activities to report on this task for 2022.
Extended Southern Ocean	cIMMAs are currently being used for the East Antarctic Marine Protected Area Proposal (EAMPA). This on-going work may provide opportunities for cIMMA to become IMMA in the future as more layer of information is gathered through the EAMPA process. Presentation and updates on IMMAs were an item on the EGBAMM (SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Marine Mammal) meeting agenda organized during the online SCAR (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research) conference (1-10 August 2022). No need for modification on the e-atlas has been identified so far.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	All 40 IMMAs in the Western Indian Ocean now have factsheets available for download. These were completed in summer 2021.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	Correspondence with AoI leads has either been undertaken or is to come to evaluate whether sufficient new data are available to re-evaluate these for IMMA status. There are no current plans for a follow-up workshop, but will if/when resources become available. Significant effort and progress has been made into producing IMMA fact sheets, which are almost complete. During this process, points of contact have been contacted to ask to cross check the information. We have not received any advice that the evidence for these IMMAs has significantly changed.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	Informative factsheets on each area were made in collaboration with the IMMA Secretariat and published for the first time.
Caspian Sea	a) In February 2022, the editing 3 Caspian IMMA factsheets was finalised in collaboration with the IMMA Secretariat; b-d) The Kizlyar Bay, Hirkan and Shirvan Aols, which were 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. The Dagestanskiy State Nature Reserve conducted surveys in the Kizlyar Bay AoI to collect scientific data for justification this AoI as a cIMMA in future.
South East Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean	As the region has been through the IMMA/AOI process relatively recently (finished in September 2022), no new submissions have been sought new. Locally, a modification to one of the IMMAs in Mexico was observed. Factsheets are in the process of being produced assisted by people that already have drafted factsheets for other IMMAs. In Central America, a research colleague from the US was proposed as the person to develop and write the factsheets since she has experience working with several marine mammal species found in the South East Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean. However, we also support the proposal of a researcher from Asia to develop those fact sheets since this person has experience drafting the fact sheets for other IMMAs.

Task 3: Assist in logistical and other support for follow-up actions and future regional workshops.

Mediterranean	Ongoing effort within the IMMA Secretariat.
Pacific Islands	We advised on the list of invitees and critical topics (Kikori Delta bycatch due to swim-bladder fisheries and Solomon Islands cultural harvest) at the International Whaling Commission Small Cetacean Committee special session on the South Pacific Islands (SC68D - 2022). This has been adopted as a formal group in the IWC in 2023. The development, research and management of IMMAs are an agenda item for the annual South Pacific Whale Research Consortium meeting in Auckland, New Zealand which gathers many of our Pacific Region IMMA members.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Ongoing effort to promote IMMA awareness through use of e-Atlas and IMMA factsheets in support of conservation and management activities, including: inclusion of IMMAs in local and national biodiversity forums; use of IMMA Factsheets in policy development and reviews, including EIAs and EMPs; and promote IMMA awareness through use of the IMMA factsheets in social media posts.
Extended Southern Ocean	Follow-up actions mainly targeted the further use of the information document that was submitted to the CCAMLR Scientific Committee in 2021(SC-CAMLR-40, 11–15 Oct. 2021). The next step is trying to get the IMMA recognized by the Antarctic Treaty.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	No special activities to report on this task for 2022.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	A range of Commonwealth and State run workshops have occurred and are occurring to review certain marine mammal species. While the IUCN IMMAs are not the drivers behind these, IMMAs inform these processes.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	A regional online meeting was conducted in June 2022 to discuss the ongoing mortality event and potential impact of the war activities on IMMAs.
Caspian Sea	The Caspian Group is ready to assist in logistical and other support for follow-up actions and a future regional workshop in the Caspian region.
South East Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean	No regional workshop is planned as the first one for this region was held in June 2022. Locally, in Mexico a workshop to develop a Conservation Management Plan for humpback whales for IWC, took place in La Paz, BCS in October 2022. It was attended by several of the participants of the workshop in Costa Rica. The area covered by the workshop is the Central America Humpback Whale Corridor IMMA. It was not a regional IMMA workshop, but it mentioned the importance of the Central America humpback whale's IMMA will be an element in the CMP. .

Task 4: a) promote awareness of IMMAs in the region by disseminating links to the e-Atlas and relevant factsheets through appropriate networks and channels, and by mentioning them in reports and publications; b) support the transition from science to management within IMMAs by encouraging regional stakeholders to consult and use IMMAs to design appropriate mitigation or management measures, including during relevant marine spatial planning or by examining the need for establishing marine mammal protected areas (MMPAs); c) implement, to the extent possible, an early warning system (EWS) to help detect any changes arising in the conservation status of the region's marine mammals that might warrant management and conservation attention or intervention.

Mediterranean	The IMMA concept as well as specific IMMAs have been presented in different fora. IMMAs have been considered as relevant case studies and promoted as relevant rationale for certain place-based measures, such as efforts to reduce the risks of ship strikes of cetaceans along the Hellenic Trench (see for example: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2022.873888/full). Ongoing effort with ACCOBAMS in the delineation of Cetacean Critical Habitat is also largely based on IMMAs, with existing IMMAs being used to delineate high risk areas. France, Italy, Monaco and Spain have developed and supported the process for the designation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area PSSA by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) at a scale that includes the North-West Mediterranean Sea, Slope and Canyon IMMA, plus the Eastern portion of the Pelagos Sanctuary and the Spanish corridor, to take into account whale population movements and distribution. The proposal has been accepted 'in principle' by the IMO in December 2022 and strike mitigation tools (e.g., speed reduction and routing measures) will be proposed as part of Associated Protective Measures within the PSSA.
Pacific Islands	a) the local IMMAs are included in all correspondence with governments to ensure they are aware of how to connect to the eAtlas, fact sheets and other materials. We encourage members to include the link to the IMMA in their work and when reviewing manuscripts and government publications; b) these are encouraged largely through SPREP as the key contact point with South Pacific governments. Most of the South Pacific Islands have Marine Mammal Protected Areas in response to the whaling threat, but new MMPAs will be encouraged where they may offer protection; c) changes in threat levels are monitored in only a few places as most areas do not have research programmes. In particular this is being examined with bycatch risk for the 'blackfish' - false killer whales, pilot whales.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	Collection of ecological data and monitoring of pressures/ threats to marine mammal populations in IMMAs are ongoing. In particular: continued research and monitoring in Satun-Langkawi IMMA, Mersing Archipelago IMMA; bycatch mitigation initiative commenced in Matang Mangroves and Coastal Waters IMMA; continued efforts to advocate for establishment of Johor Dugong Sanctuary within the Mersing Archipelago IMMA; continued annual research monitoring of the humpback whales and rough-toothed dolphins in the Babuyan Marine Corridor IMMA; continued annual research monitoring of the cetaceans in the Bohol Sea IMMA; proposed establishment of the Babuyan Marine Corridor IMMA as a special conservation area - project proposal to USAID-INSPIRE under review; suspension of all research monitoring efforts in the Iloilo-Guimaras Straits IMMA due to political conflicts/ issues on the construction of a bridge despite declaration of Bago (within Iloilo-Guimaras Straits IMMA) as a MPA for Irrawaddy dolphins, it has not been considered in the plans of the bridge construction; continued monitoring on the Irrawaddy dolphin population and promotion of its conservation in East Kalimantan and surrounding regions; analyses of pygmy blue whale migratory routes between Savu Sea (eastern Indonesia) and the sub-Antarctic waters, based on the November 2021 study; monitoring of marine mammal diversity in Raja Ampat, West Papua; monitoring of Bryde's whale population around the Tabanan area, southwest Bali; monitoring of spinner dolphin populations and their interactions with the local dolphin watching industry in Lovina and surrounding areas, north Bali.
Extended Southern Ocean	In 2022, IMMAs in the Southern Oceans were mainly promoted by EGBAMM members (SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Marine Mammal), IUCN members, the French Agency for Biodiversity, the British Antarctic Survey and the French Ministry. IMMAs are currently being used for the EAMPA proposal. They are also being used for a Sub-Antarctic project on ecoregionalisation with Australia, New Zealand and France (Online meeting held in February 2022). 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. EGBAMM members (SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Marine Mammal) meet every two years and discuss any changes arising in the conservation status of the region's marine mammals that might warrant management and conservation attention or intervention.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	Two new papers were published that feature work inside IMMAs (see https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/resources/publications/). IMMAs were presented during a workshop aiming to built up a proposal for the creation of new MPA (French National Reserve) around the Eparses Islands (Tromelin, Juan de Nova, Europa, Bassas da India). The IMMA factsheets and boundaries will be used to develop the case for the protection of the entire EEZ. IMMAs were presented during a workshop held in Oman in November 2022 aimed at promoting Oman's participation in a regional Conservation Management Plan for Arabian Sea humpback whales, as well as during a meeting focusing on regional collaboration for marine mammal conservation in the Arabian Gulf in December 2021, with follow-up in the early months of 2022.
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	IMMAs continue to be presented as a tool to inform impact assessment, management and planning to stakeholders, including state and Federal governments and consultancies. Feedback from the state and Commonwealth Governments in Australia, for example, has been that these tools are very useful. IMMAs are now regularly included for consideration in applications for marine developments as part of New Zealand's resource consenting process. Early Warning Systems to help detect change have been raised in one-on-one discussions with government.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	IMMA concept was presented to the government of Ukraine as a background for further MPA planning and marine spatial planning. In Bulgaria National Action Plan for conservation of cetaceans was developed (approved by Minister of Environment and Water on 9 Jan 2023). Short section on IMMAs is included indicating what IMMA means and listing Black Sea IMMAs that are within Bulgaian EEZ - Emona, Western Black Sea and Kaliakra to Danube Delta. Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests from Romania, direction Waters under which MSFD is coordinated is aware of the IMMA in waters under Romanian jurisdiction. The Turkish Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change declared in the official gazette the TSS as a Special Environment Protected Area (SEPA) in November 2021.
Caspian Sea	a) The Caspian Group promoted awareness of IMMAs in Caspian and other countries. The article, referring to Caspian IMMA and the scientific paper "The Important Marine Mammal Area Network: A Tool for Systematic Spatial Planning in Response to the Marine Mammal Habitat Conservation Crisis", was posted on KASPIKA website (http://kaspika.org/en/2022/03/25/important-marine-mammal-area-network-2/), and the information on it was distributed to 169 specialists from 13 countries. Three Caspian IMMAs (with reference to IMMA Regional Workshop for the Black Sea, Turkish Straits System and Caspian Sea) were mentioned in a petition (https://chng.it/dF6ZLGSz) signed by 42 thousand people. Initiatives regarding Caspian IMMAs in Russia and Kazakhstan were mentioned in the annual report to the Russian Minister of Ecology "Scientific and methodological support to the implementation of the Joint Action Plan of Russia and Kazakhstan for the conservation of the Caspian seal population for 2021-2026". b) And the most significant event: In 2022, Kazakhstan started creating a marine nature reserve for Caspian seals. The project is implementing under financial support of NCOC N.V. and the Committee of Fisheries of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources (MEGNR RK). The reserve would include breeding, moulting and haul-out, transitory migration and feeding areas identified for Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian Sea in 3 Caspian IMMAs. The Natural Scientific Justification will be submitted to MEGNR RK in April 2023, Technical and Economic Justification – at the end of this year.
South East Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean	In Mexico, (a) to promote awareness of IMMAs in the region and with the hope (b) to promote transition to management, local coordinators presented to the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (the National Commission for Protected Natural Areas) the IMMAs for Mexico's Pacific ocean. The proposal made is to incorporate IMMAs in the development of the management plan of the "Refuge area to protect the whales in the marine areas that are part of the national territory and those over which the nation exercises its sovereignty and jurisdiction". In Chile, (a) media coverage was reached using social (IG, FB) as well as digital media (links upon request). In Central America, each group shared links to the IMMAs with different relevant conservation groups, newspapers, and government agencies. Further, several local experts are collaborating in developing a conservation management plan that highlights the importance of habitat connectivity for migratory species. WWF is leading this large-scale conservation initiative. The plan describes the importance of MPAs are conservation tools. It summarizes several important marine mammal regions along the Eastern Tropical Pacific.

Task 5: Promote the collection of scientific knowledge of the ecology and status of marine mammals in the region, including facilitating/stimulating: a) the collection of new ecological data on the existing marine mammal populations; b) monitoring of existing regional relevant pressures on and threats to marine mammal populations; c) surveying existing management measures in place (mostly within IMMAs) to address pressures; d) examining the need for the establishment of MMPAs and follow up with proposals, lobbying, and providing scientific and conservation expertise.

Mediterranean	A number of research and monitoring projects are ongoing across various IMMAs in the Mediterranean, over various spatial scales and under different frameworks. Ongoing data collection is also taking place in existing Areas of Interest, to provide enough data to be proposed in the near future as cIMMAs, once a second workshop for the region will be planned and organized.
Pacific Islands	A) In addition to single species or location studies, consortia of researchers throughout the Pacific region are collaborating to combine data to inform population/ area assessments. The upcoming Special Issue on Marine Mammals in Pacific Conservation Biology will improve our understanding of populations and areas. B) Many of the Pacific IMMA members informed the recent SPREP Whale & Dolphin and Dugong Action Plans and are engaged in research around these. Recent research outputs from Hawai'i, including description of Biologically Important Areas, will be used to better assess threats to marine mammals. The IWC South Pacific Islands SM Group elevated the concerns with likely unsustainable levels of fisheries bycatch and cultural hunting (Solomon Islands). There is additional research investment to examine both these sensitive issues. Discussion is ongoing for the longline bycatch of false killer whales and pilot whales. The 2022 IUCN revision of Dugong has listed New Caledonia dugong as Endangered with threats clearly identified. C) The SPREP Action Plans are the blueprint for regional work in the South Pacific and will be used to guide protection. The US government covers the northern Pacific management measures. D) We continue to lobby for protection of marine mammals in the Pacific.
NE Indian Ocean, SE Asian seas	No special activities to report on this task for 2022.
Extended Southern Ocean	SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Marine Mammal promotes the collection of scientific knowledge of the ecology and status of marine mammals in the region.
Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas	The presence of the Shimoni and the Greater Pemba Channel IMMA feature in the Biodiversity Assessment of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline in Tanzania encouraging further data collection and mitigation of coastal cetaceans. The Mascarene Islands and associated oceanic features IMMA and IMMAs in general were used in project documents to promote the collection of cetacean distribution data in off-shore waters of the SWIO by MMO onboard platforms of opportunity -(OSIRIS, RESILIENCE, Monaco Exploration). IMMAs featured in a WWF-led report on whale migratory corridors, with a focus on those in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Seas (see http://bit.ly/3YYn5p2).
Australia-New Zealand and South East Indian Ocean	Researchers are encouraged to contribute new datasets to such global databases. Several baleen whale photo-ID catalogues exist across the regions as separate initiatives where such contributions are made to evaluate population sizes, and mixing between populations/subpopulations. There is new effort being made towards collaboratively comparing across these catalogues, which will further inform IMMAs for Southern Right Whales, including connectivity among aggregation areas reflectd in the IMMAs. Researchers are continuing to undertake research in these areas as well as in knowledge gap areas to eventually feed into an updated IMMA/AoI process.
Black Sea and Turkish Straits System	Post-war monitoring and bycatch mitigation measures which would necessarily include IMMA monitoring were identified as priority goals and presented at ACCOBAMS MoP and CBD CoP.
Caspian Sea	a-b) In 2022, the Caspian Group was collecting ecological data on the Caspian seal. The monitoring of the Caspian coastal line and waters was conducted in 5 Caspian countries for several reasons, particularly, for: identifying the cause of the species mass mortality in Kazakhstani waters (April-June, November, 2022); monitoring of Caspian seals haul-out sites in Kazakhstan in April 2022; identifying the cause of mass dead seals stranding on the Russian coast in May and December, 2022; monitoring of seal strandings in Azerbaijan and Iran a few times per year; monitoring of the Caspian seal number in Turkmenistan a few times from January to October 2022. The results of these and other activities were emailed to the Caspian Group and 169 specialists of the circulation list mentioned above, posted on KASPIKA website.
South East Temperate and Tropical Pacific Ocean	No additional information has ben gathered, considering the previous process ended in September 2022. However, Mexico coordinator have the baseline to develop databases on issues a,b and c. These will be the objectives of the regional group of experts. About the issue d please check task No 4.In Peru, new information and surveillance on health status and emerging diseases in pinnipeds collected between Nov 2022-Feb 2023, based on Avian Flu H5N1 outbreak with confirmed transmission to marine mammals. In Central America, the different research groups have been involved in a country-level monitoring effort during the first part of 2023. In some cases, this includes items a) and d). Funding support is needed to address b) and c).