

EBSAs & Multi-criteria decision analysis

MCDA provides a systematic way of representing alternative viewpoints in management decisions and finding a good compromise in a transparent way.

What is MCDA?

Conservation management decisions are rarely simple usually requiring multiple objectives and considerations to somehow be balanced into a solution that (ideally) is acceptable to all. Multi criteria decision analysis (MCDA) is a generic term to describe a suite of tools that can be used to compare alternative management strategies to determine which produce suitable outcomes, given conflicting needs. MCDA was developed to aid in decision making and has been applied across a wide range of disciplines (e.g. Energy, Financial and Environmental Planning). MCDA provides a systematic way of representing alternative viewpoints in management decisions and finding a good compromise in a transparent way.

Why do we need MCDA to select EBSAs?

The definitions of EBSAs are justifiably broad. However, in a region where relatively little is known, many areas can potentially meet one, many or all of the CBD criteria that define an EBSA. There is a need to assess individual nominations for candidate EBSAs against the full suite of CBD criteria, and balance individual nominations across the full set of nominated or existing candidate EBSAs in the region. Categorising, prioritising and recommending EBSAs is a complex process that requires an approach that can be justified at an international level. The suite of decision tools and experience available through MCDA can greatly assist in this process.

Why is selecting EBSAs a complex problem?

- Meaningful objectives are not easy to quantify and progress against them is difficult to monitor (e.g. there is no agreed endpoint)
- There are multiple categories of information, including data-products, expert and local knowledge
- There is a large set of alternative solutions that will meet many of the individual and network objectives
- Both the scientific and decision-maker communities are diverse with often conflicting interests
- Different objectives and semantic ambiguity can make reaching consensus especially difficult in such a diverse community

The schema on the reverse side suggests a process that could be used to evaluate nominated candidate EBSAs. An MCDA approach would be chosen that provides a robust, repeatable and transparent process in steps 2 and 3 of the schema. This will provide the capacity to revisit nominations as new information becomes available and provide a clearer idea of the options available for selecting candidate EBSAs that meet local, regional and global goals.

Evaluating candidate EBSAs with Multi-Criteria decision analysis

This schema suggests a process that could be used to evaluate nominated candidate EBSAs. An MCDA approach would be chosen that provides a robust, repeatable and transparent process in steps 2 and 3 of the schema.

