

Regional processes: focus on the Pacific



L to R: Fiji Islands Voyaging Society Crew; Green Sea turtle on black sand beach, Hawaii; Pacific Participants in Pacific 2020 visioning meeting, Fiji. Photos courtesy of Colleen Corrigan

Applying CBD criteria for identifying ecologically or biologically significant areas (EBSAs) at the regional scale is appropriate for a number of reasons. The biological and ecological significance of an area is governed by marine processes which take place at broad scales, including the influences of ocean currents, patterns of biological productivity and dynamics of species life history patterns. Ecological connectivity and representativity, which are hallmarks of protected area networks, can be achieved most effectively through planning at the regional level.

Ecosystem-based science that informs the appropriate range of actions needed for ocean management can be limited by political boundaries that a regional approach can transcend. A regional perspective also allows for taking a “big picture” approach when assessing multiple EBSA criteria.

While several countries and organisations are already developing methods for applying the seven CBD scientific criteria, there is much to learn about conducting analyses at a regional scale and with a wide range of data availability and reliability. Besides influencing scientific methodologies and ecosystem approaches, working at the regional scale allows capacity building efforts to be far reaching and intergovernmental. The countries that border ocean basins

are largely different in their capacities for access to technology, training, and resources such as vessels that can access high seas areas. A regional approach provides opportunities for collaboration and increased efficiencies.

Regional approaches to applying CBD EBSA criteria or other similar criteria have already been conducted in the Antarctic, Mediterranean and the Northeast Atlantic. While all of these have had significant, useful outputs, each case can provide a wealth of insights and lessons learned regarding the challenges and opportunities for working at such scales of marine conservation.

Lessons for a Regional Approach

- Communicate with partners early in process
- Be present, participatory and receptive
- Identify key constituents in the network
- Agree on a common set of objectives
- Determine scale(s) and boundaries of approach
- Aim for integration with existing initiatives
- Explore funding options and collaboration
- Guide results based on importance and relevance

Pacific Regional Approach

The Pacific Ocean is the largest ocean basin in the world, covering more area than the earth's entire terrestrial realm, and hosts a remarkable array of biodiversity. While many Pacific countries are working toward meeting global marine conservation targets for protecting representative habitats within their national jurisdiction, there is an urgent need to build a complementary effort and comprehensive approach for identifying important areas of the Pacific open ocean and deep seas that are in need of protection.

GOBI has been working with partners in the Pacific to identify a set of EBSAs at the regional and sub-regional

scales. We have developed a series of preliminary regional maps to identify critical areas where projected distributions of threatened and endangered marine species correlate with other oceanographic features and environmental data, including human use activities (see map). This process has helped us understand the limitations and benefits of one approach to identifying critical areas of the ocean using currently available datasets. More recently, GOBI has been working with existing and growing partnerships in the Pacific to ensure long-term scientific support and application. Lessons learned in the Pacific can be replicated in other marine regions.

