

PICES participates in a Convention on Biological Diversity Regional Workshop

by Thomas Therriault

The United Nations, through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), is in the process of identifying/describing ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) around the world using a series of regional workshops. Scientific criteria agreed to by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention form the basis to describe the EBSAs (see Annex 1 of [COP decision IX/20](#)) and include: productivity, biodiversity, important areas for threatened and endangered species, life history criteria required for species to survive and thrive, unique and rare features, vulnerability and fragility, and naturalness. Identification of any area as an EBSA is a scientific process recognising and describing its importance to the ecological and/or biological defining criteria – the next step in the process (yet to be taken) is to discuss and identify any special management measures that may be recommended for any particular EBSA. A regional workshop for the North Pacific was held from February 25 to March 1, 2013, in Moscow, Russia. As a recognized organization with significant knowledge of the North Pacific, PICES was asked to officially nominate an expert to participate in this workshop. It was anticipated that PICES involvement would increase the awareness of the CBD and its EBSA process within PICES, assist in the nomination of relevant experts through PICES' scientific networks, help CBD identify other relevant organizations to be invited, facilitate the use of workshop products in future marine biodiversity conservation efforts in the North Pacific to ensure

sustainable use, and work with the CBD Secretariat to conduct the workshop. The author of this article was nominated and served on the steering committee for this regional workshop and as rapporteur for one of the major elements of the final workshop report that will be posted on the CBD website.

The first day of the workshop focused on several housekeeping issues. The introductions identified participants from several member countries, including Canada, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, Republic of Korea, and Russian Federation (see the group photo, Fig. 1). The People's Republic of China had confirmed participation but visa difficulties precluded their involvement in Moscow. In addition, a representative from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States and several international organizations, including NOWPAP, NPAFC, and PICES participated in the workshop. Workshop discussions and analyses were supported by a technical team from Duke University, USA.

Following UN procedures, Dr. Alexander Shestakov (Director, WWF Global Arctic Programme) and Dr. Jake Rice (Chief Scientist, Fisheries and Oceans Canada) were identified as workshop co-chairs. In addition, rapporteurs were selected for each of the major sections of the workshop report. Each international organization was then invited to provide a presentation to workshop participants.

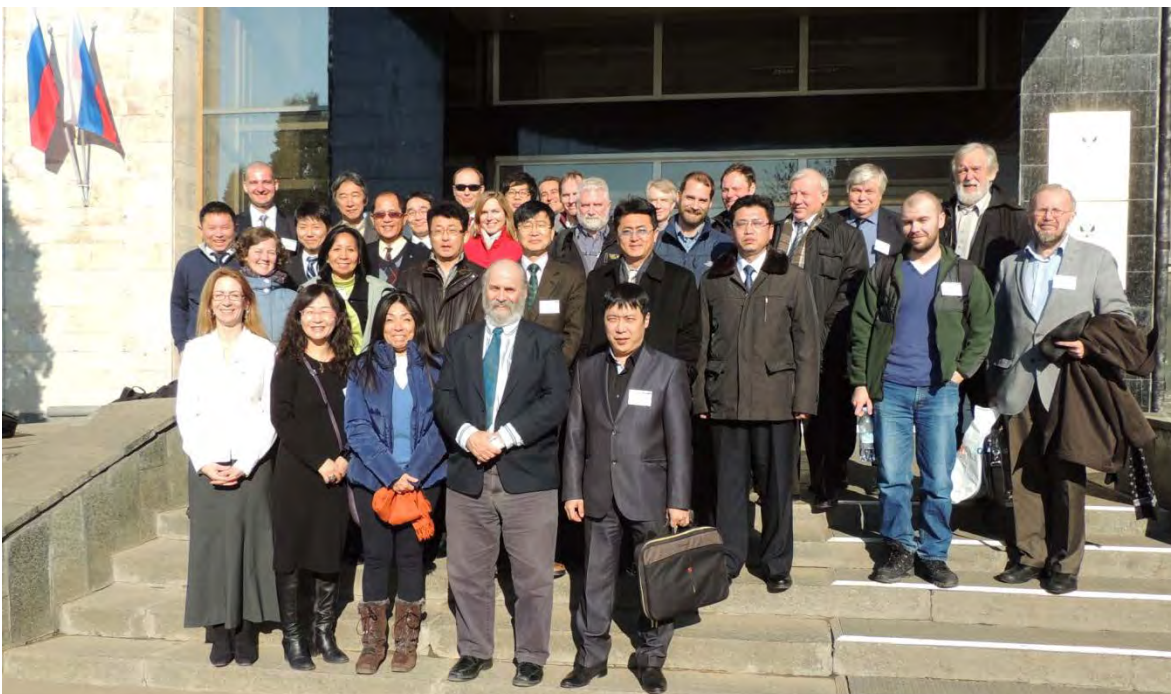


Fig. 1. Participants at the CBD Workshop to identify EBSAs for the North Pacific (February 25 – March 1, 2013, Moscow, Russian Federation).



Fig. 2 Dr. Therriault provides an overview of PICES to workshop participants.

Dr. Therriault described the mandate and structure of PICES, efforts of its expert groups, and products (e.g., North Pacific Ecosystem Status Reports) that would be of value to this CBD process, and an overview of the PICES FUTURE program (Fig. 2). This was followed by country presentations of national processes which apply EBSA criteria or similar national processes. The first day also included a review of the criteria that would be used to identify EBSAs for the North Pacific and the scope that workshop participants would consider. All countries other

than Mexico and the Russian Federation requested that their national waters not be included in this meeting for identification of EBSAs, mostly because of national processes already underway. The workshop participants agreed on the following scope for the workshop: marine areas within national jurisdiction of Mexico and the Russian Federation, marine areas beyond national jurisdictions in this region, the northern limit identified at the Western South Pacific regional workshop on EBSAs, the northeastern tropical Pacific area, and the Bering Strait, including the Russian coastal area and “Donut Hole” in the Bering Sea, but excluding the marine areas within the national jurisdiction of the USA.

Following a preliminary scoping exercise on the start of Day 2, workshop participants spent the next three days identifying EBSAs in the North Pacific using the CBD criteria, including compiling the necessary supporting documentation. By the end of the workshop, participants had agreed upon 20 EBSA units (Table 1) that will be tabled for discussion at the next meeting of COP (winter 2013 or early 2014). The report from the meeting is expected to be available soon on CBD’s [website](#).

Table 1 EBSAs identified at the CBD workshop for the North Pacific.

Number	Areas meeting EBSA criteria
1	Peter the Great Bay, Russia
2	West Kamchatka shelf, Russia
3	South East Kamchatka coastal waters, Russia
4	Eastern shelf of Sakhalin island, Russia
5	Moneron Island shelf, Russia
6	Shantary Islands shelf, Amur and Tugur Bays, Russia
7	Commander Islands shelf and slope, Russia
8	East and South Chukotka coast, Russia
9	Yamskie Islands and western Shelikhov Bay, Russia
10	Alijos Islands, Mexico
11	Coronado Islands, Mexico
12	Guadalupe Island, Mexico
13	Upper Gulf of California region, Mexico
14	Midriff Islands region, Mexico
15	Coastal lagoons and islands off Baja California and Offshore Waters Complex, Mexico
16	Juan de Fuca Ridge Hydrothermal Vents
17	Northeast Pacific Ocean Seamounts
18	Emperor Seamount Chain and Northern Hawaiian Ridge
19	North Pacific Transition Zone and bordering currents
20	Albatross Arc

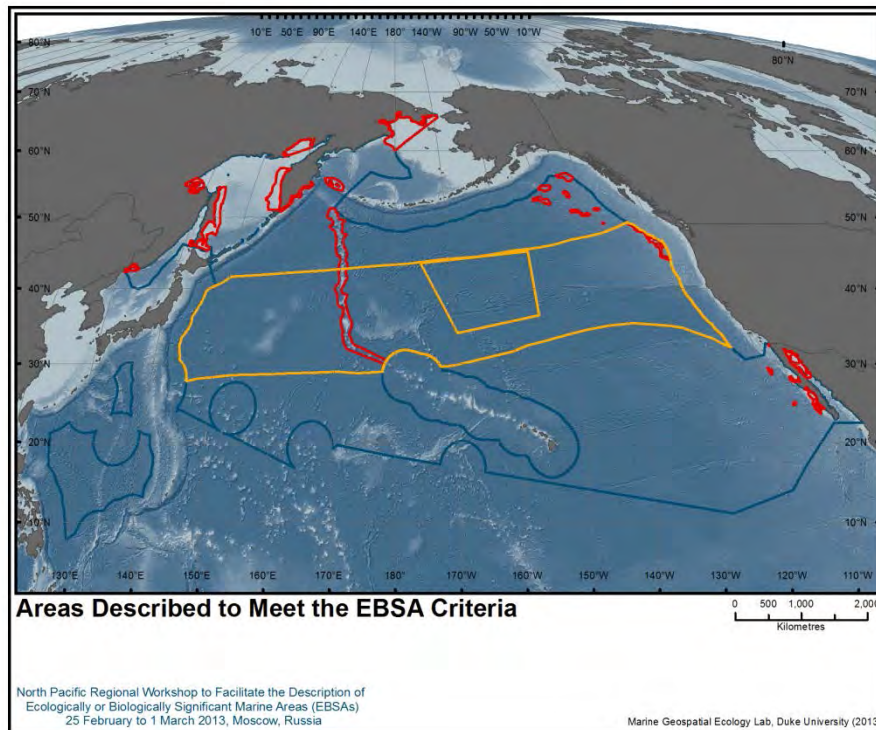


Fig. 3 Spatial extent of EBSAs developed at the CBD workshop for the North Pacific. Blue line indicates the boundary of the area considered by the workshop. Polygons in red indicate those areas described against EBSA criteria by the workshop. Polygons in orange indicate those features that are inherently not spatially fixed, and described against EBSA criteria by the workshop.

There was debate at the workshop about whether the eastern and western North Pacific gyres should be included as potential EBSAs, considering their importance for salmon populations. However, not enough information was available at the meeting to support including these regions as EBSAs at this time but participants recommended these regions should receive further consideration in future CBD processes. It is worth highlighting the area of the North Pacific Transition Zone (EBSA Number 19 identified by the large orange polygon in Fig. 3) is extraordinarily large for an EBSA, and was defined primarily on the basis of the northerly and southerly seasonal migrations of the Transition Zone chlorophyll frontal zone. The narrative describing this region notes that this is not a geographically fixed feature but one which is seasonally variable in its location. This is in contrast to the bathymetrically-fixed EBSAs proposed about the various seamount chains in the North Pacific.

PICES has considerable experience with identifying and describing ecologically and biologically important areas in the North Pacific, although it has not (yet) used the CBD EBSA terminology and criteria. Some examples include the two North Pacific Ecosystem Status Reports, topic sessions at PICES Annual Meetings (most recently in Portland in 2010), and WG 19's efforts on ecosystem-based management. The ever increasing international interest in EBSAs and current and planned global efforts to identify such areas both within and beyond country Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) represent an important opportunity for PICES. As an intergovernmental organization we have a wealth of science experts to consider these issues and to provide scientifically defensible recommendations not only for EBSAs but for other international initiatives currently underway in the North Pacific (e.g., World Ocean Assessment; see page 12 in this issue).

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