

# MPA NEWS



Published on *MPA News* (<https://mpanews.openchannels.org>)

## A brief examination of "other effective area-based conservation measures" and what they mean for MPAs

In 2010, delegates to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity agreed to extend the deadline for signatory countries to reach the target of conserving 10% of their marine and coastal ecoregions in protected areas. Instead of aiming for the year 2012 as originally targeted, delegates delayed the deadline to 2020 ([MPA News 12:3](#)).

They also agreed to a reframing of the target, now known as Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. To meet the percentage-based protection goal, countries no longer need to do it with only protected areas. They can also count "other effective area-based conservation measures" toward the goal. Aichi Target 11 reads:

"By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas *and other effective area-based conservation measures*, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape." ([www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rationale/target-11](http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rationale/target-11))

This raises the question, what exactly are "other effective area-based conservation measures"? And how will they impact how countries tally their progress toward Aichi Target 11, since protected areas are no longer the only areas being counted?

The short answer to both questions is, "We don't really know yet." But processes are underway, at the international and national level, to define the term and its use.

### WCPA task force

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) has instituted a task force to provide advice to the Convention on Biological Diversity on Aichi Target 11. Not only will it examine what "other effective area-based conservation measures" may entail, but also what additional thorny phrases like "effectively and equitably managed" mean.

"This is critically important," says Dan Laffoley, vice chair - marine of WCPA. "At present there is a real lack of clarity among countries on what counts. There is also a great need to connect MPAs and sites that meet 'other effective means' into wider measures such as marine spatial planning."

WCPA's *Protected Planet Report 2014*, which tracked progress toward global targets for protected areas (<http://bit.ly/ProtectedPlanet2014>), described the term as "poorly defined and largely undocumented." It said:

"A key challenge in recognizing 'other' sites is to acknowledge their value for conservation without overestimating the level of protection. Any definition must therefore include those sites that truly complement protected areas in conserving biodiversity in the long term, and exclude those that have no conservation value or no security of protection into the future (e.g., areas temporarily set aside for conservation before use for commercial forestry)."

IUCN's "A primer on governance for protected areas conserved areas", released in 2014 (<http://bit.ly/MPAgovernanceprimer>), also covers other effective area-based conservation measures, which it calls OECMs. (Others abbreviate it as OEABCMs). The primer suggests such areas can be defined as "geographical space where de facto conservation of nature and associated ecosystem services and cultural values is achieved and expected to be maintained in the long-term regardless of specific recognition and dedication." This could include, for example, a voluntary conservation area that a national government does not wish to recognize as a protected area.

Laffoley says WCPA - Marine is pushing for greater clarity with the new task force leading the way. "We've made defining this term a priority," he says.

### Defining it at the national level

While global guidance on the term is still in the works, countries have set about developing their own guidance. David MacKinnon is chair of the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA; [www.ccea.org](http://www.ccea.org)), a nongovernmental organization. CCEA is coordinating the development of science-based guidance on interpreting and reporting of OEABCMs within Canada's protected area community of practice. That community includes practitioners from Canadian provincial, federal, and territorial protected area agencies, as well as NGOs and academic experts. CCEA does not necessarily represent the views of any one agency or organization, but cooperates with Environment Canada and all provincial, federal, and territorial agencies to manage the Canadian Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System ([www.ccea.org/tools-resources/carts](http://www.ccea.org/tools-resources/carts)).

Asked if he anticipates that each country may interpret OEABCMs differently, MacKinnon answers yes. "There are likely to be differences," he says. "Nations may believe that their progress toward the targets is being compared against others primarily on the basis of their percent coverage of protected areas and OEABCMs. These numbers, while simple to communicate, can mask big differences in actual progress toward the conservation of biodiversity. A nation that does a good job of conserving 10% of its territory may be more effectively slowing biodiversity loss than one that does a poor job of conserving 20%. With all our demands on the planet's ecosystems and resources, it's not always easy or cheap to establish and maintain new, well-conserved areas, especially in the places where they are needed most. So the focus on a single number can create a temptation to interpret OEABCMs quite broadly, and to report areas and measures that aren't necessarily very effective or durable, but which may already be in place or easy to establish. And it's probably more tempting to do this when decision-makers see themselves as having fewer options to achieve the numerical targets with well-conserved but difficult-to-establish areas." [Note: The views expressed here are those of MacKinnon speaking on behalf of CCEA, and do not necessarily represent the views of Nova Scotia Environment or any other Canadian government conservation agency or non-governmental conservation organization with which CCEA cooperates.]

MacKinnon says we should keep in mind why the global targets were established in the first place. "The primary purpose of both protected areas and OEABCMs is to effectively conserve ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity in situ, thereby helping to stem biodiversity loss," he says. "That is clear from the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 ([www.cbd.int/sp](http://www.cbd.int/sp)) and the Convention on Biological Diversity itself, as is the need for the targets to be pursued as a unified package. If areas of limited conservation effectiveness are reported toward the numerical targets, it means that important conservation gaps are perhaps being masked, and conservation needs may be going unmet."

CCEA has conducted four national workshops on the question of OEABCMs over the past four years with experts from across Canada. MacKinnon suggests it may be more useful to define how protected areas and OEABCMs are alike rather than how they are different.

"We have concluded that protected areas and OEABCMs must have a core set of shared traits in order to be effective for conserving biodiversity in situ," he says. "If one of those core traits is absent, it elevates the risk that an area won't be effective over either the short or long term. Briefly, some of the core traits we've identified include:

1. They should be well-defined geographically;
2. They should have objectives for biodiversity conservation, achieved through conservation of biodiversity as a whole;

3. Their conservation objectives must receive first priority when in conflict with other objectives;
4. The mechanisms by which the areas are established must have the comprehensive ability to exclude, control, and manage all activities likely to have impacts on biodiversity, and must compel the prohibition of incompatible activities;
5. They should be in place for the long term;
6. The mechanisms by which they are established must be difficult to reverse; and
7. They should be in effect year-round.

"If an area has these core traits," says MacKinnon, "we're not so concerned whether it is called a protected area or an OEABCM, because we can be confident it's likely to be effective in contributing to the targets. Nevertheless, we can apply the IUCN guidance to determine whether an area fits the definition of a protected area ([http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/iucn\\_categoriesamp\\_eng.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/iucn_categoriesamp_eng.pdf)). If it doesn't, we suggest reporting it as an OEABCM."

**For more information:**

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