

# Clarifying terms used in “area-based conservation”: A contribution to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

With the adoption of a new global biodiversity framework in 2020, there is a critical opportunity to set the world on a path to a sustainable future for biodiversity. Area based conservation, both in terrestrial and marine realms, is an important element of the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020* and there is no doubt that it will also be essential to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

However, the proliferation of terms used to describe approaches to area-based conservation has created confusion, at times hampering discussions on their role in the post-2020 framework. This discussion document seeks to reduce this confusion by proposing a categorisation of terms commonly used for approaches to area-based conservation.

The CBD thematic workshop on area-based conservation measures for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (1-3 December 2019) is a key opportunity to facilitate focussed discussions on key priorities for area-based conservation, thereby informing the development of the framework.

## We describe the three following groups of area-based conservation as follows:

1. **Protected Areas (PAs) and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)** cover the two broad, internationally-defined categories often used to describe area-based conservation in the context of Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. Either of the two terms can be used to describe areas under the governance of governments, private actors, indigenous peoples and local communities, or combinations of actors. They may or may not be legally-designated (see accepted definitions on next page).
2. **Area-based conservation management or governance approaches** are applied with conservation objectives and/or outcomes. Although PAs and OECMs will often be subject to one or more of these, an approach can also exist independently of PAs and OECMs. This approach can exist independently of PAs and OECMs. Crucially, the term used to refer to a particular approach cannot be used to infer whether it aligns with the PA or OECM definition and approaches need to be assessed on a case-by case basis. Governance of these approaches can be under governments, private actors, indigenous peoples and local communities, or combinations of actors.
3. **Areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services** are areas that have been recognised as important for biodiversity and ecosystem services, irrespective of how these areas are governed or managed. They are generally identified either using a recognised standard set of criteria, or using systematic conservation planning approaches. These areas may overlap geographically with any other group.

## Stage of Establishment

In addition to the different groups mentioned above, approaches to area-based conservation may fall wholly or partially into either of the following “Stages of Establishment”:

- **Implemented:** activated or fully put in place. It is then expected that approach to area-based conservation will be operational and reported on, with a management plan and reporting processes in place.
- **Proposed or Pledged:** a commitment has been made by one or more stakeholders that they will govern and manage an area in a particular way, but this commitment has not yet been fully put into action.

## Comments and suggestions? Send us your feedback!

Dr Naomi Kingston,  
UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre  
[naomi.kingston@unep-wcmc.org](mailto:naomi.kingston@unep-wcmc.org) | [@naomiekington](https://www.linkedin.com/in/naomiekington) | [@unepwcmc](https://www.facebook.com/unepwcmc)

Dr Frank Vorhies,  
EarthMind  
[vorhies@earthmind.orgv](mailto:vorhies@earthmind.orgv) | [@earthmind](https://www.linkedin.com/company/earthmind) | [@conservareas](https://www.facebook.com/conservareas)



# Clarifying terms used in “area-based conservation”

## Protected Areas & Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

### Protected Areas

'A geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives' (CBD, 1992).

'A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values' (IUCN, 2008).

Lopoukhine & Dias (2012) note that these definitions are broadly compatible.

There are over 1,600 different terms used at regional, national and local level to describe measures that meet this definition.

### Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

'A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values' (CBD, 2018).

An as yet unknown number of terms, used at regional, national and local level, may describe measures that meet this definition.

## Area-based management or governance approaches

These cover many management or governance approaches that are applied to specific geographic areas and have objectives and/or outcomes relevant to conservation and sustainable use. PAs and OECMs may be subject to one or more of these, but they may also apply to areas beyond PAs and OECMs.

### Some examples:

**Territories of Life (ICCA):** Territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities (*full definition here: <https://www.iccaconsortium.org/index.php/discover/>*).

**Verified Conservation Areas (VCA):** A voluntary commitment to area-based conservation which can include preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilization, restoration, or enhancement of the natural environment (*Earthmind.org/vca*).

**Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA):** Nearshore waters and associated coastal and marine resources that are managed at a local level by the coastal communities, land-owning groups, partner organizations, and/or collaborative government representatives who reside or are based in the immediate area.

Many **Certification Schemes** for responsible production and consumption include measures for area-based conservation, notably in sectors such as agriculture, extractive industries, fisheries, forestry, tourism, and water.

**Restoration areas** are areas managed in a way that assists the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed (*Society for Ecological Restoration, 2004*).

**Sacred Natural Sites** are areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities (*IUCN 2008*).

**Connectivity Areas** are landscapes and seascapes managed in a coordinated way to allow the unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth (e.g. corridors, managed forests).

## Areas of importance for biodiversity & ecosystem services

These are areas that have been identified as being important for biodiversity and ecosystem services irrespective of management, governance or designation. However, they may overlap geographically with any other measure.

### Some examples:

**Ecologically or Biologically Sensitive Areas (EBSA):** Special areas in the ocean that serve important purposes, in one way or another, to support the healthy functioning of oceans and the many services that it provides. (*<https://www.cbd.int/ebsa/about>*)

**Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA):** Sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. (*IUCN, 2016*).

**Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA):** Areas that need special protection because of their significance for recognized ecological or socio-economic or scientific reasons and which may be vulnerable to damage by international maritime activities. (*IMO, 2005*)

**Wilderness Areas** are biologically and ecologically largely intact landscapes that are mostly free of human disturbance. (*Watson et al., 2016*)

Areas identified as **Critical Habitats** as defined by the International Financial Corporation Performance Standard 6 (IFC PS6)

**Nationally equivalent systems:** For example, in France the *Zones Naturelles d'Intérêt Ecologique Faunistique et Floristique* (ZNIEFF) identify and describe areas which have the greatest ecological interest for hosting biodiversity heritage. In 2007, Mexico published an analysis of the gaps and omissions in the conservation of biodiversity with detailed interactive mapping (*Conabio-Conanp-TNC-Pronatura-FCF, UANL. 2007*).