



# Important Marine Mammal Areas — IMMAs

**IUCN SSC-WCPA Marine Mammal Protected  
Areas Task Force**



**NEAMPAN**

**Expert Group Meeting on Advancing Marine  
Mammal Conservation in Northeast Asia**



**11 September 2025**



**Presenter**

**Dr Gill Braulik, Deputy Chair**

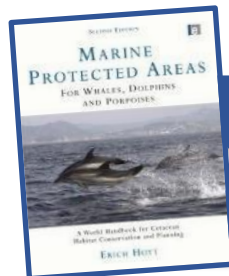
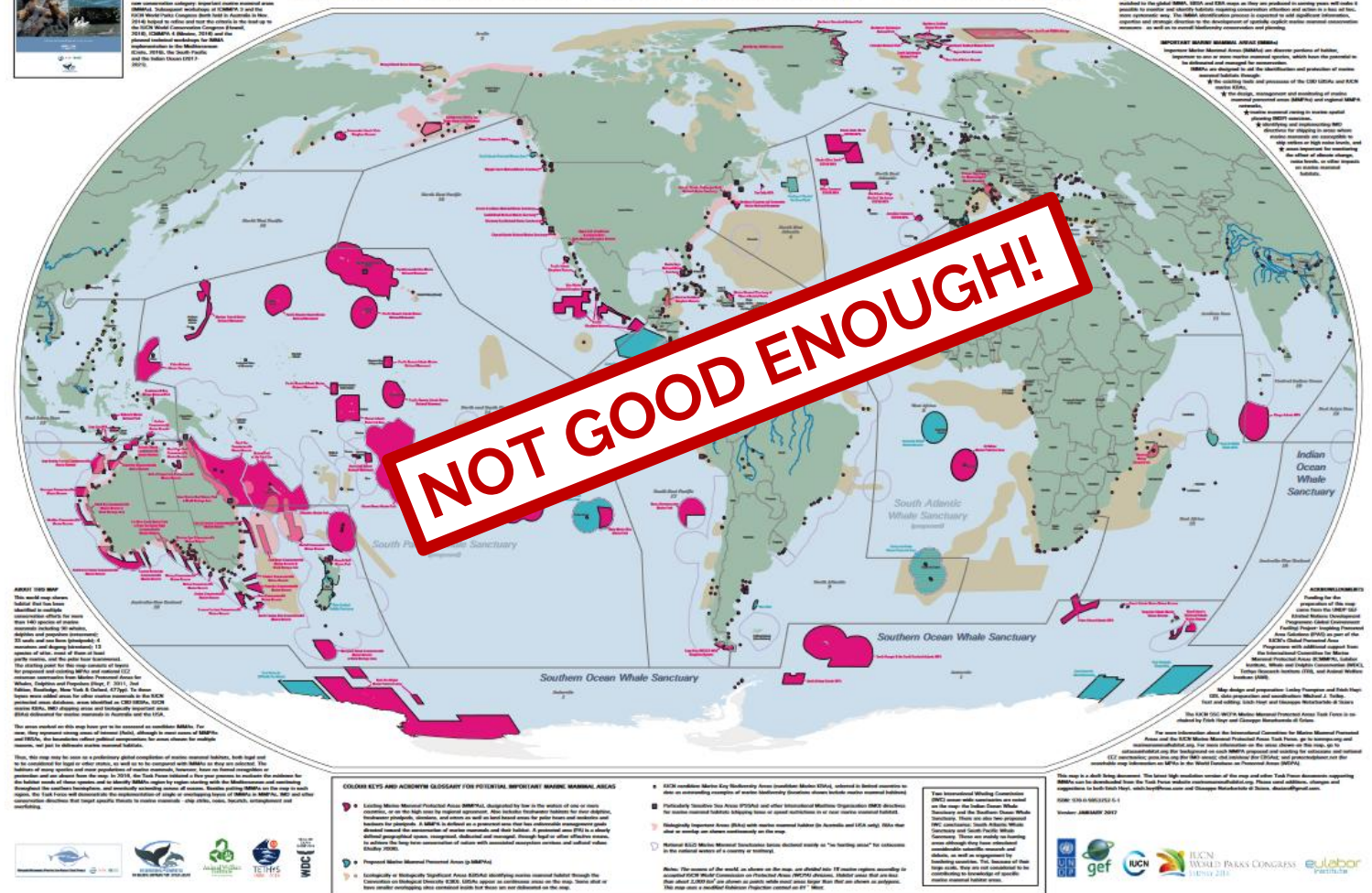
# Are marine mammals adequately protected?

# WORLD'S MMPAs

## 1990s - 2000s

[illegible]

## Working Towards Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs): Ground Zero



# *The IMMA initiative was launched by the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force*

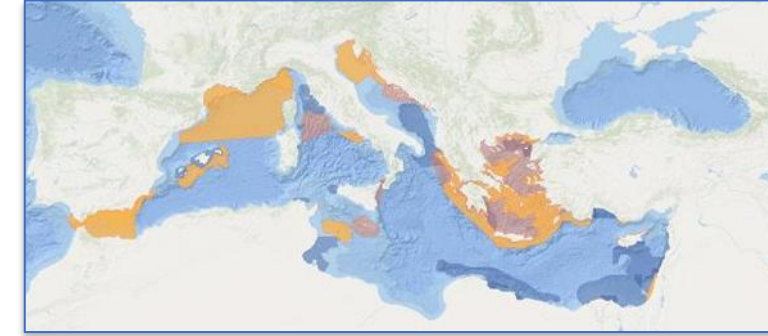


## **MMPATF Co-chairs**

*Giuseppe Notarbartolo  
di Sciara  
& Erich Hoyt*



## **Development of Criteria and Handbook**



**1990s -  
2000s**

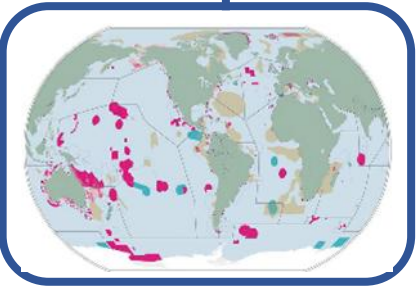
**2013**

**2013-2015**

**2016**

***Establishment  
of Task Force***

***Beginning in 2016, the  
Task Force rolls out a tool  
to identify a worldwide  
network of IMMAs***







## A PLACE-BASED CONSERVATION TOOL

**What is an  
IMMA?**

*“discrete portion of habitat,  
important for one or more marine  
mammal species, that has the potential  
to be delineated and managed  
for conservation”*



# What is an IMMA?

*The identification of IMMAs is an evidence-driven, **purely biocentric process**, based on the **application of scientific criteria** and on the **best available science**.*

*\* An IMMA is **NOT** a Marine Protected Area  
IMMAs are **NOT** identified on the basis of political or management considerations but on the basis of data*



Align

The IMMA Criteria & Handbook drafted in consultation with over 1000 experts!

✓

✓

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The IMMA Handbook

March 2024



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IUCN SSC -

Criterion A - Species or Population Vulnerability

Criterion B – Distribution and Abundance

*B1 – Small and Resident Populations*

*B2 – Aggregations*

Criterion C – Key Life Cycle Areas

*C1 – Reproductive*

*C2 – Feeding*

*C3 – Migration*

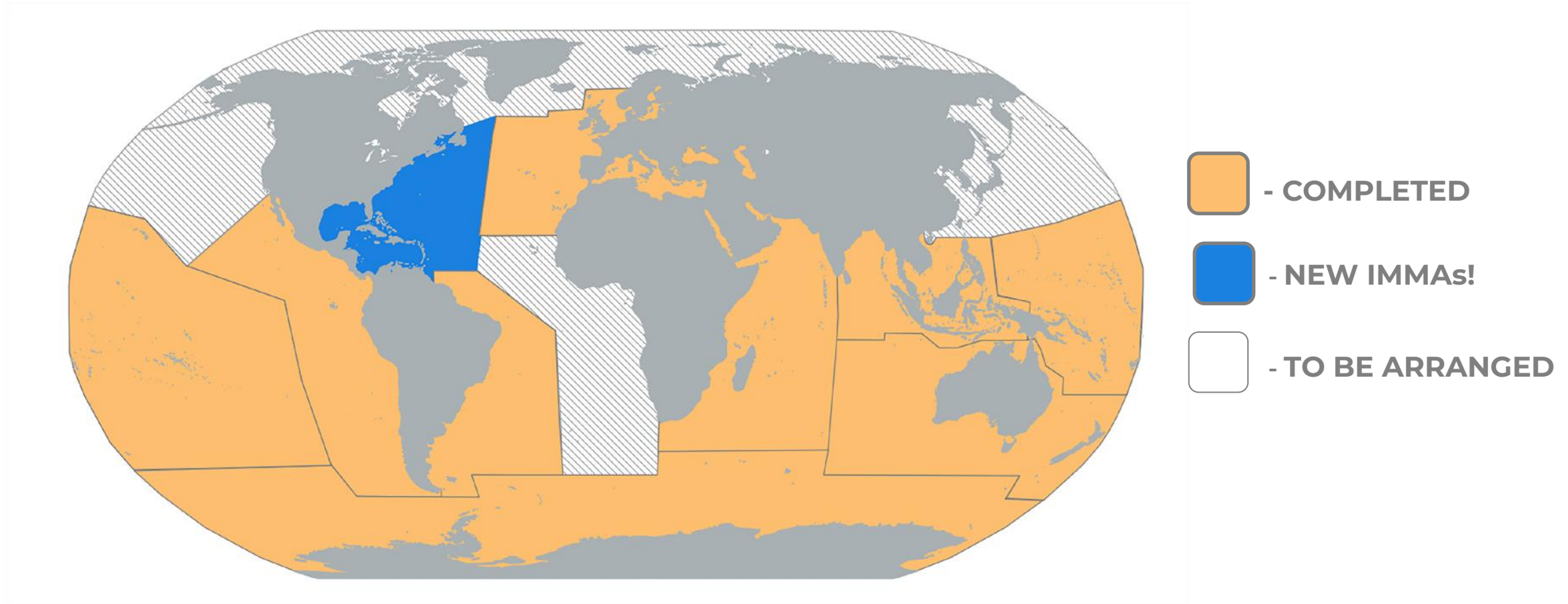
Criterion D – Special Attributes

*D1 – Distinctiveness*

*D2 – Diversity*



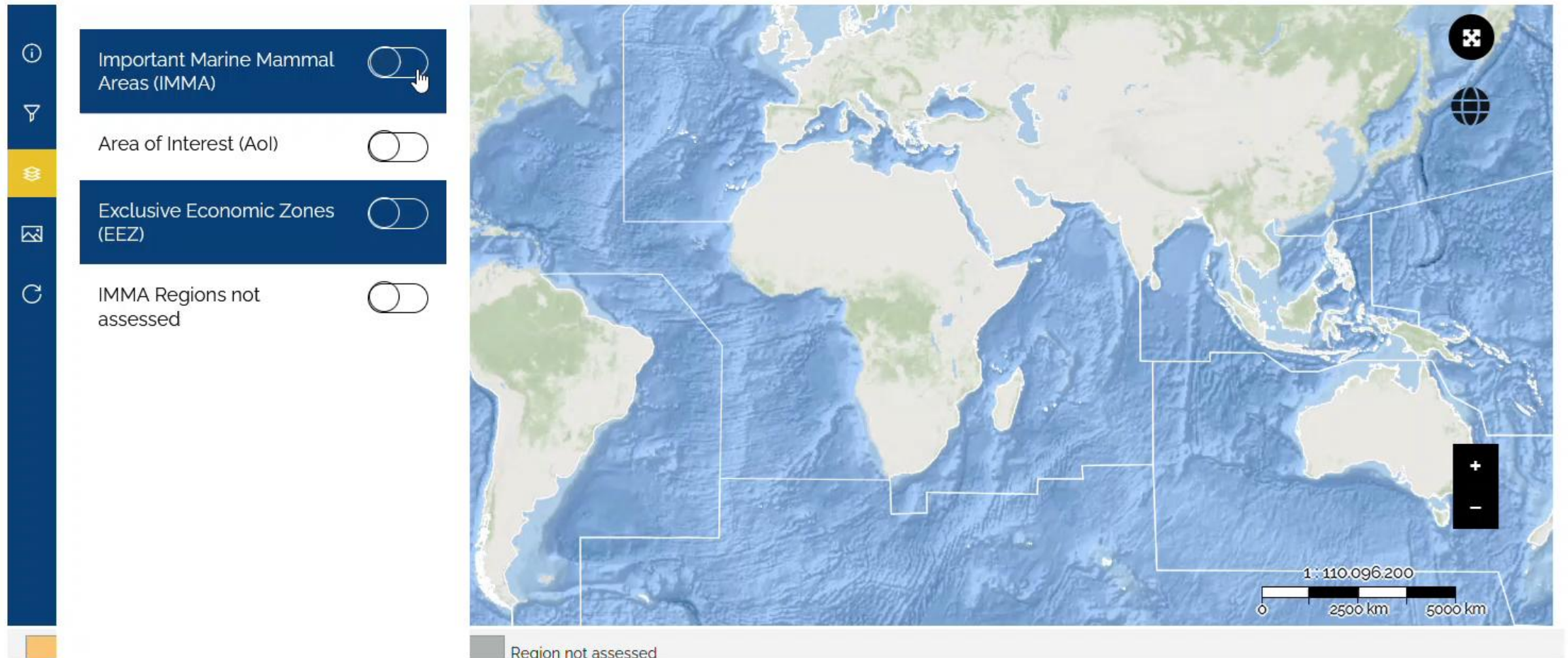
**79.2% of the global ocean waters have been examined**  
**11 regional workshops, 320 + experts**



Candidate IMMAs (cIMMAs) proposed by regional experts during the workshops **are reviewed by an independent panel** before being posted as IMMAs on the Task Force's e-Atlas:

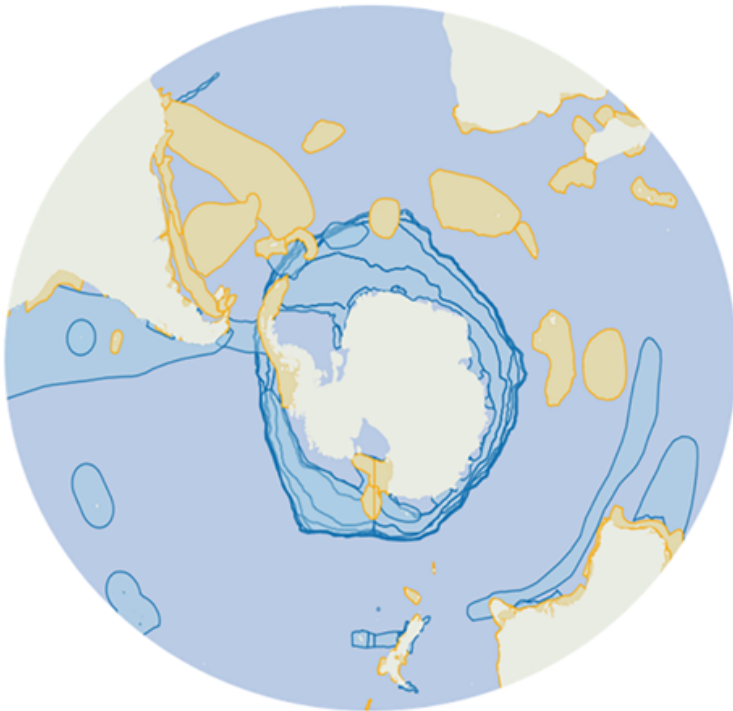
[www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas](http://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas)

## IMMA E-ATLAS

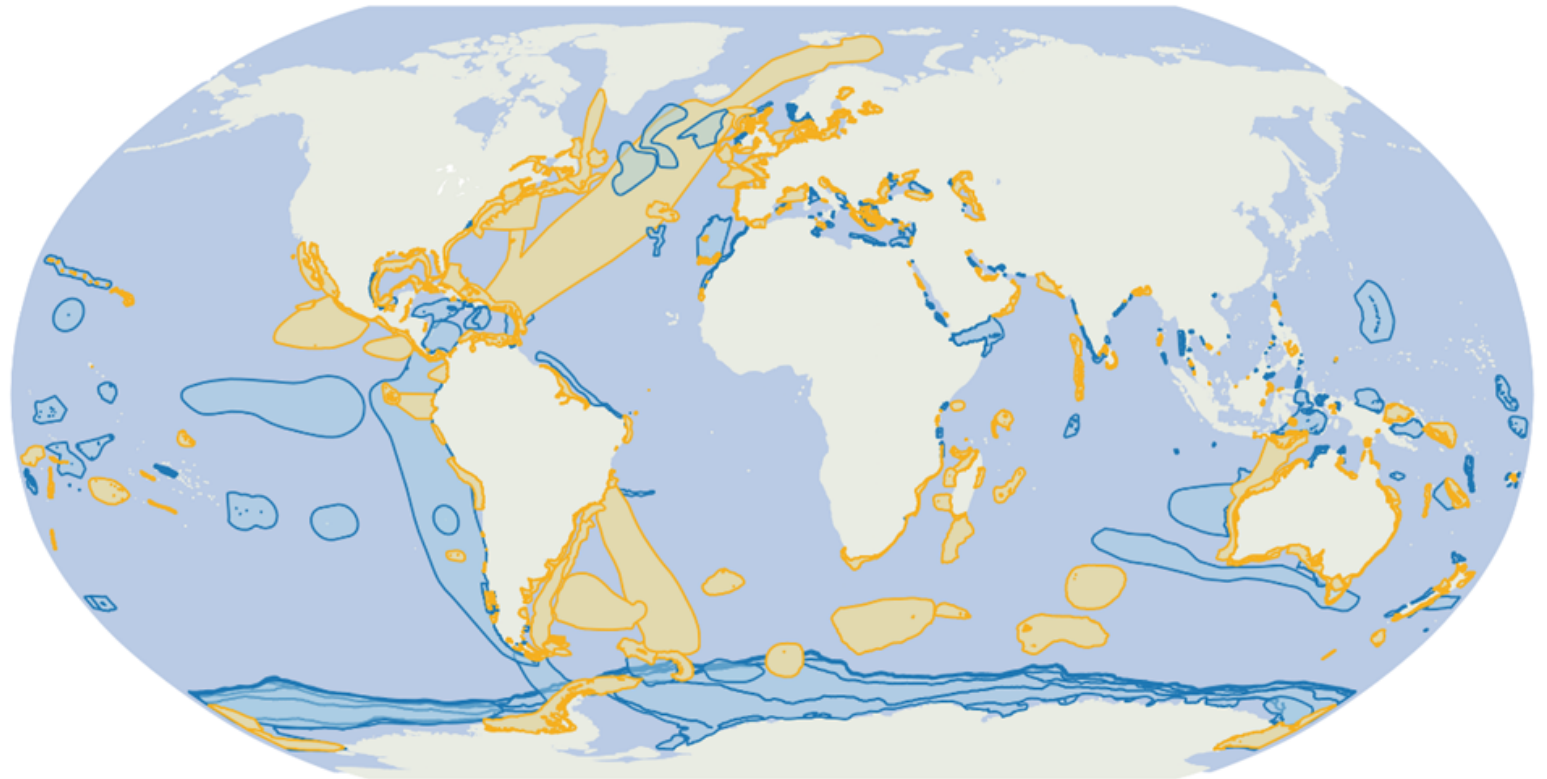




In sum, to date, the IMMA work has resulted in the identification of **323 IMMAs** and **196 Areas of Interest**



Polar South (Orthographic)  
0 - 4,500 km



Global (Robinson)  
0 - 4,500 km

Important Marine Mammal Area  
Area of Interest

Identified IMMAs provide important habitat for 100 of the 135 recognised marine mammal species.

76% of IMMAs were identified, at least partly, based on important habitat for a threatened (VU, EN, CR) marine mammal species.



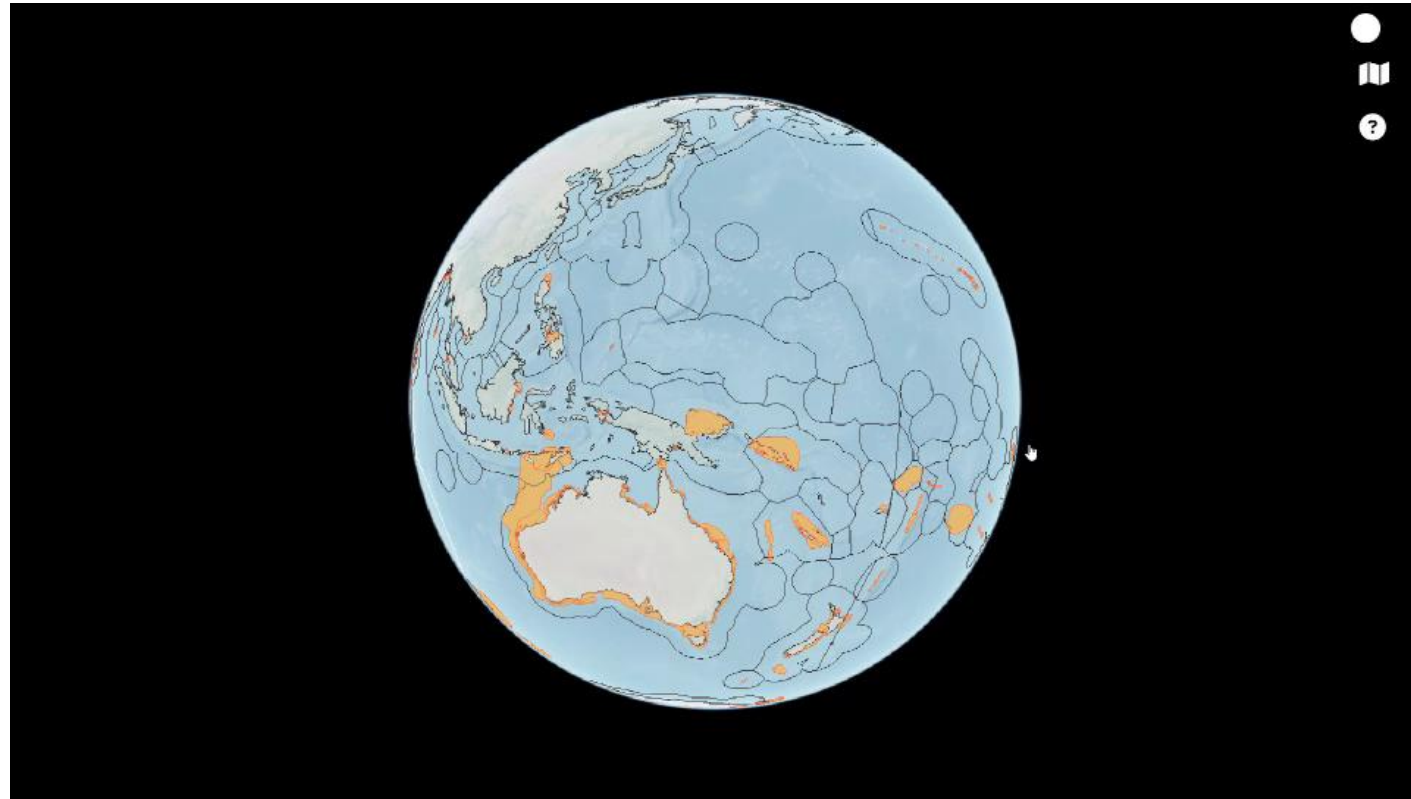
# IMMAs surface cover 51,503,283 km<sup>2</sup> 17.8% of the ocean examined in workshops

52% within EEZ waters

48% fall within ABNJ

IMMAs occupy **11.2%** of the **ABNJ surface** examined in workshops, providing scientific knowledge to contribute to the UN GBF goal (Target 3) of protecting **30% of the ocean by 2030** as well as supporting the

**BBNJ Treaty**





The screenshot shows the IMMA E-ATLAS website interface. The browser address bar displays <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/>. The page features a navigation menu with links: HOME, IMMAS, IMMA E-ATLAS, TASK FORCE, RESOURCES, CONTACTS, and NEWS. The IMMA E-ATLAS dropdown menu is open, showing options: Documents, IMMA citations guidance, IMMA Spatial Layer Download (highlighted with a red box), and Download. The main content area displays a world map with orange-shaded regions representing IMMA areas. At the bottom, there are logos for proteus, UN WCMC environment programme, and ipieca | 50th anniversary.

IMMA E-ATLAS

Documents

IMMA citations guidance

IMMA Spatial Layer Download

Download

proteus | UN WCMC environment programme

ipieca | 50th anniversary



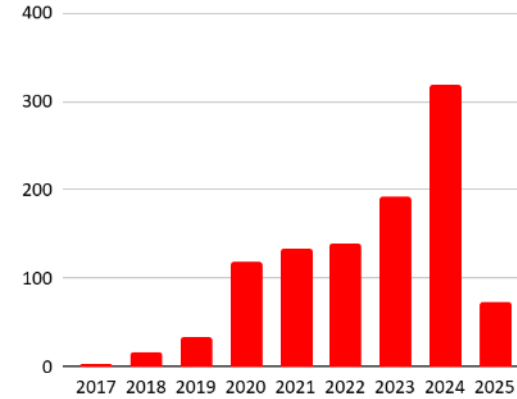
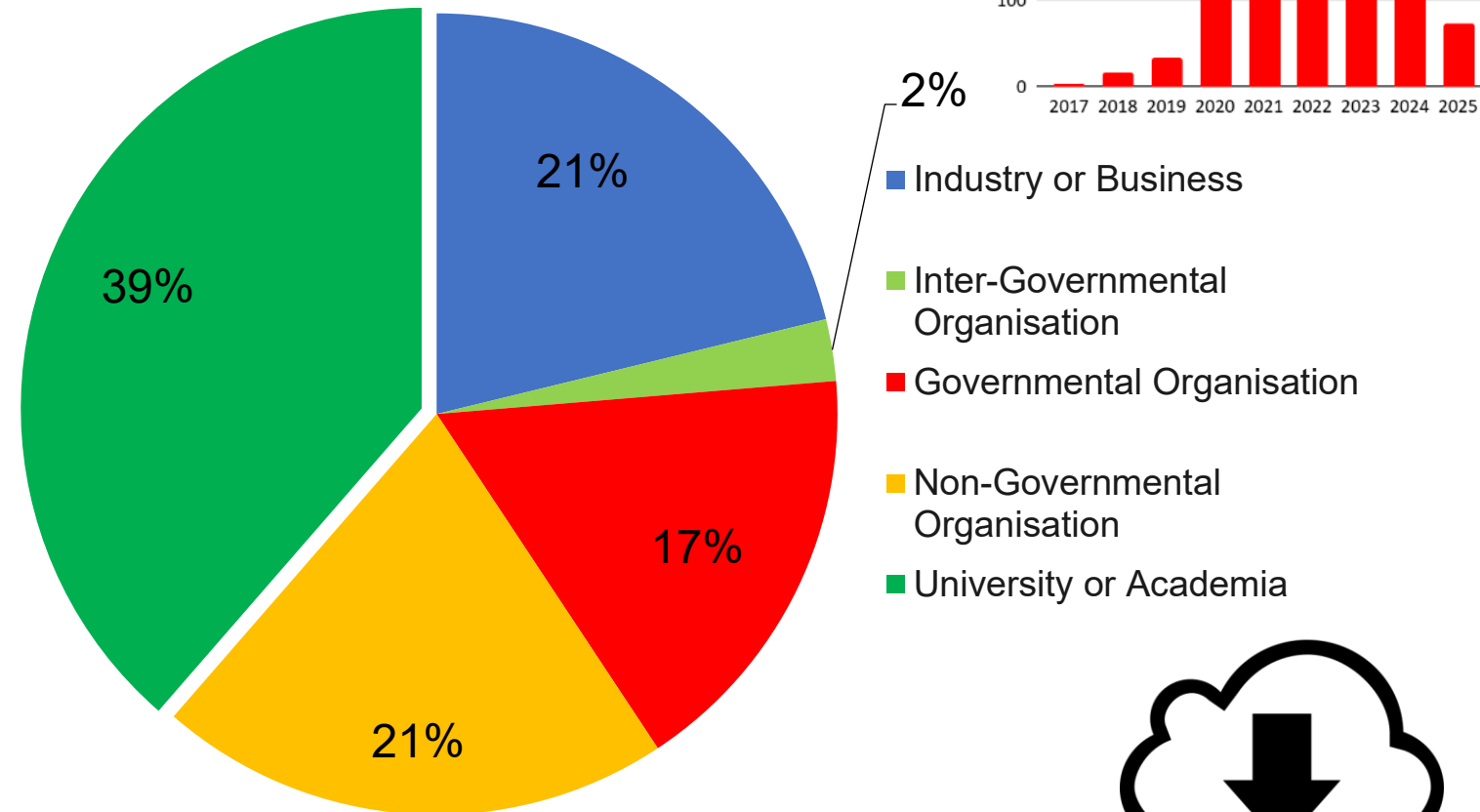
# Shapefile Requests

More than 1,000 downloads of the IMMA spatial layers  
Users from 90+ countries

Requested by **171** Government Agencies  
In **40** countries on **6** continents

**213** Requests from Industry  
In **42** countries

Almost **400** downloads from **~300**  
different universities  
in **65** countries



# Marine Conservation and Management Initiatives taking advantage of IMMAs

- ✓ **Supporting Maritime Spatial Planning** and management of human activities at sea (e.g., shipping, fishing, industrial and scientific exploration)
- ✓ Supporting the establishment of **Marine Protected Areas** (i.e. Bangladesh and Viet Nam)
- ✓ Used by **U.S. Navy** for low frequency (LFA) sonar management, as well as by other navies and NATO
- ✓ Supporting the identification of **marine Key Biodiversity Areas** via the IUCN Standard
- ✓ Supporting refinement of National **Biologically Important Areas**
- ✓ **Inspiring Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs)**  
– a IUCN SSC–SSG project





# Marine Conservation and Management Initiatives taking advantage of IMMAs

- ✓ Inspiring **Indonesia's coastal zoning** to protect Irrawaddy dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*)
- ✓ Inspiring **Malaysia's national policy** on Biological Diversity
- ✓ Supporting the **International Whaling Commission** (IWC) to identify potential shipstrike hotspots
- ✓ Used by **cruise ship companies** to focus education and document sightings
- ✓ Used by **Proteus, Vanguard, and GFW** who are adding IMMA layers for easy access to industry & for risk analysis for shipping and fisheries





# Identifying IMMAs in the Northwest Pacific Region



- **Workshop** will be convened in coming 5 years to identify IMMAs in the Northwest Pacific Region
- Scientists and data holders across the region will be invited to contribute to IMMA identification
- **Potential Areas of Interest** for marine mammals can be proposed
- These will be subject to **peer review** before publication



## What can you do in preparation?

- **Learn more** about IMMAs and understand the criteria by reading the handbook and website
- Think about what data you have that might be used to support an IMMA proposal
- Consider publishing unpublished data in reports or papers to support future IMMA proposals

WHALE AND  
DOLPHIN  
CONSERVATION

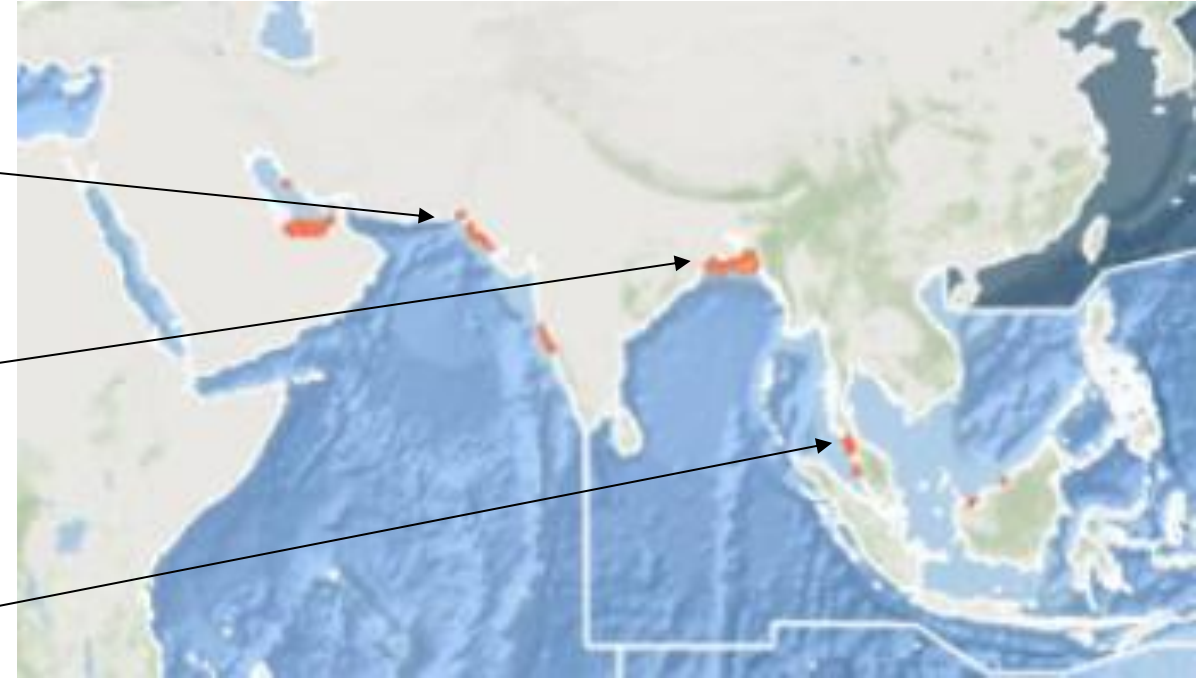




# Existing Neophocaena IMMAs

10 IMMAs identified:

- **Indus Estuary and Creeks IMMA** – India and Pakistan. B1
- **Coastal Northern Bay of Bengal IMMA** – Bangladesh and India. B2, C1
- **Satun-Langkawi Archipelago IMMA** – Malaysia and Thailand. B2, C1 and C2



WHALE AND  
DOLPHIN  
CONSERVATION



**No IMMAs identified  
yet for the Spotted Seal**

preliminary Areas of Interest (pAoi)  
for the NW Pacific can be submitted  
anytime



# Acknowledgements

## Supporting organisations:



Bundesministerium  
für Umwelt, Naturschutz,  
Bau und Reaktorsicherheit



Convention on  
Biological Diversity



MARINE MAMMAL  
PROTECTED AREAS  
TASK FORCE



SPREP  
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional  
Environment Programme



## Partner organisations:

WHALE AND  
DOLPHIN  
CONSERVATION



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



University of  
St Andrews



# MMPATF Contact Details

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