



FACTSHEET

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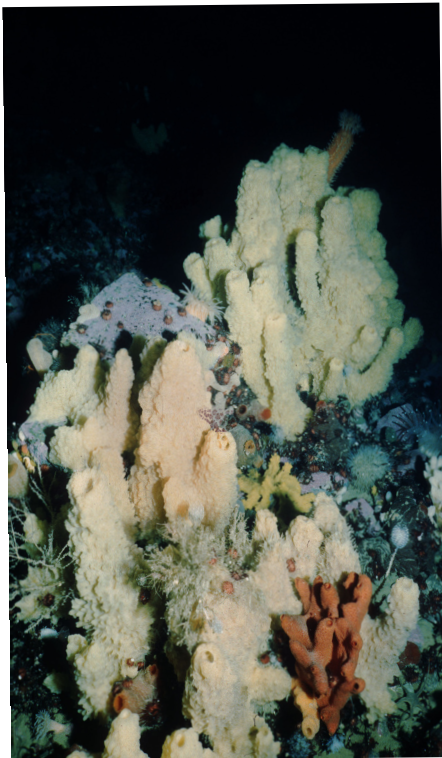
# GIFT TO THE EARTH

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## World's First High Seas MPA and Plans for Protection of Antarctic Seas

CCAMLR

### Summary & Background



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The South Orkneys MPA hosts a rich biodiversity comparable to that of world wide known sites such as the Galapagos.

The Southern Ocean is the one of the last great wildernesses on earth. Isolated by ice, wind and wild seas, it is one of the world's most pristine environments. What appears at first glance to be a relatively simple, cold and inhospitable ecosystem is in fact a region of spectacular natural beauty that is home to an outstanding diversity and productivity of wildlife. The unexpected beauty of the Southern Ocean is now recognised as supporting some of the most biologically productive regions of the world's oceans.

Acknowledging the importance of the region's productivity, diversity, and role in regulating global climate, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has committed to delivering a representative network of marine protected areas (MPA) throughout the Southern Ocean by 2012. To achieve this objective, CCAMLR has agreed to a concrete step by step work plan and the South Orkneys MPA, the first high seas MPA, representing the first component of the Southern Ocean MPA network, was adopted in November 2009.

Coherent and ecologically representative networks of high seas MPAs are an important tool for protecting the rich and often vulnerable biodiversity of the 70% of our oceans that lie beyond national jurisdiction.

The commitment of CCAMLR to delivering a representative network of MPAs in the Southern Ocean by 2012 is recognised by WWF, the conservation organisation, as a Gift to the Earth (GtE) – a globally significant action which demonstrates environmental leadership and promotes future conservation success.

## The Southern Ocean

The Southern Ocean is an integral part of the global ocean system – this is where waters from all the ocean basins are mixed and deep ocean waters that drive global oceanic circulation are formed around Antarctica. Due to its unique role in influencing the world's oceans and climate, it is a vital element of the earth system.

The Southern Ocean's exceptional productivity supports a rich biodiversity, and is home to some of the most fascinating creatures on our planet, including:

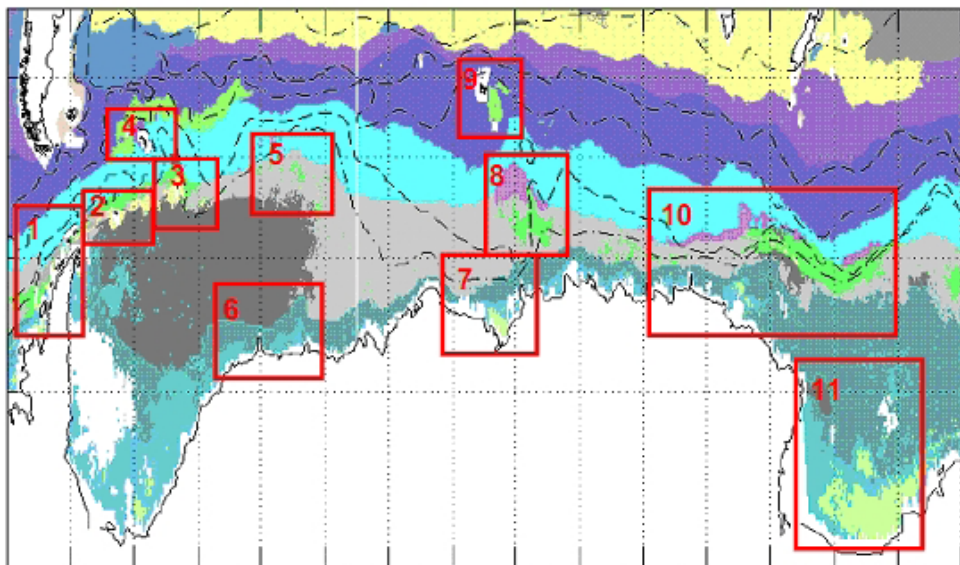
- emperor and adélie penguins, wandering albatross and Antarctic snow petrel
- leopard, elephant and krill eating crabeater seals
- recovering populations of the blue, fin, sei, southern right, humpback and minke whales
- fish with special adaptations that allow them to thrive in polar seas
- the largest invertebrate on the planet – the colossal squid, and
- bottom dwelling creatures that in some places match the biodiversity of the Galapagos.

## S Ocean MPA Work Plan

CCAMLR has prioritised and committed to the development of a representative network of MPAs in the Southern Ocean by 2012. In 2007, a CCAMLR workshop agreed on a circumpolar bioregionalisation which resulted in the identification of eleven priority areas for implementing MPAs (see map). In 2009, CCAMLR adopted a 5-step work plan to facilitate meeting the World Summit on Sustainable Development goal of implementing representative systems of MPAs by 2012, involving data collation, a workshop to review progress and share expertise, identifying candidate areas and submitting these for approval.

## South Orkney MPA

The S Orkneys MPA, about 94,000 km<sup>2</sup>, was identified through systematic



conservation planning in the southern region of the Scotia Sea by UK scientists. It includes two pelagic bioregions, a significant Adélie penguin foraging area, productive areas of the shelf edge, seamount ridges, important benthic shelf habitats and a range of different sea ice conditions. It is within one of the eleven identified priority areas and entered into force in May 2010.

## Conservation Benefits

Fishing and discharge or refuse disposal from fishing vessels are banned, protecting the area's rich biodiversity, facilitating maintenance of critical ecosystem processes, and allowing scientists to better monitor the effects of climate change on the Southern Ocean. The area is considered a high priority for protection in light of current and future possible pressures including fishing, both legal and illegal, climate change, tourism and shipping. The S Orkney MPA sets an important precedent for governance of the high seas and establishing marine protected areas worldwide - demonstrating it is possible to generate the political will for the protection of high seas, identify priority areas for protection, set conservation objectives and implement management measures that protect biodiversity and ecosystem function and services. When the commitments, made by

CCAMLR and the Antarctic Treaty Parties, to deliver the work plan are met, a significant advancement of the protection of the high seas will have been achieved setting a clear example for other regions to follow.

CCAMLR must now concentrate on delivery of the work plan milestones in order to meet its deadline of a representative network of Southern Ocean MPAs by 2012.

## More Information

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The **Gift to the Earth** is WWF's recognition of a globally significant conservation achievement, which addresses WWF's conservation priorities in globally significant natural areas by:

- Advancing conservation of biodiversity, especially forest, freshwater and marine ecosystems, or enhancing the prospects for survival of threatened species.
- Addressing global threats posed by climate change, toxic chemicals and unsustainable use of resources such as timber, freshwater and fisheries.

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### Why we are here.

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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