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Background

STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 took note of the national EBSA process in Finland, referred to as EMMA, which was at the time out for the final commenting round. The meeting invited Finland to present how the work was received in STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020. Finland is invited to present the outcome of the national EBSA process and how the work was received.

The Finnish ecologically significant marine underwater areas, the so-called EMMAs, are for the first time described and presented in this report. EMMA was produced under the Finnish Inventory Programme for the Underwater Marine Environment VELMU, ordered by and custom-made for the Finnish marine spatial planners. The aim is to inform especially the marine spatial planners and experts in the field, but also the general public, about the ecologically significant areas of the Finnish coast, utilizing the best possible data available. EMMA collates the vast amount of data collected within VELMU for over ten years. The end product is an easy-to-use and clear spatial data set, as well as verbal descriptions of the Finnish valuable marine areas. To describe the significant areas, we applied the criteria of the Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas -process by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, with minor modifications. Six criteria were used. The descriptions of the significant marine areas were made in collaboration with numerous experts belonging to over ten institutions, utilizing their local knowledge and special expertise, as well as literature. Eighty-seven ecologically significant underwater marine areas were identified from the Finnish coast. The size of the EMMA areas varied between 0.1 km² and 577.5 km². The area boundaries are mainly based on data about aquatic plants, macroalgae, invertebrates, Baltic Sea coastal habitats, geology, as well as breeding areas for fish, collected within the VELMU. Areas important for birds, marine mammals, and terrestrial natural habitats are mentioned in the descriptions of the areas but were not considered when deciding on the area status. Only areas from which enough data had been collected this far, could be classified as an EMMA area. As VELMU is still ongoing, and more data continuously becomes available, it is also possible to update the EMMAs.

The EMMAs have a wide range of applications. Applications may include, among others, the promotion and development of the sustainable use of the sea, offshore wind energy management, or maritime route planning. One should, however, keep in mind that, the underwater natural values might not be restricted inside the EMMA boundaries and might continue outside of those, and that the EMMA boundaries only contain the clusters of natural values.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the presentation.