Key Biodiversity Areas – areas of particular importance for biodiversity to focus protection and conservation of 30% of the planet by 2030

The KBA Partnership welcomes the first draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (post-2020 GBF) and recognise the huge effort by the CBD to compile all the inputs from government and civil society. However, we are concerned that there is insufficient recognition of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the post-2020 GBF or in the headline indicators. Given that KBAs represent by far the largest global network of systematically identified sites of particular importance for biodiversity, and the growing focus on identifying and conserving KBAs by nations, we believe that the post-2020 GBF needs to reflect KBAs more strongly if it is to be relevant. In particular, KBAs can help to ensure that expansion of networks of protected areas and OECMs under target 3 is directed to the most important sites for biodiversity.

What are Key Biodiversity Areas?

KBAs are sites of importance for the global persistence of biodiversity. Sites qualify as KBAs if they support significant numbers of threatened or geographically restricted species, a significant portion of one or more threatened or geographically restricted ecosystems, have ecological integrity, and/or have high irreplaceability. As such they cannot be easily replaced, and thus need to be safeguarded. The KBA Standard is the only global system for identification of important sites for biodiversity using a science-based approach covering all taxa and all ecosystems. The criteria were developed through extensive consultation with the conservation community around the world over a period of 5 years, and build on four decades of experience in identification of important sites for biodiversity (including in particular Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and Alliance for Zero Extinction sites).

Over 16,000 KBAs have been identified to date across the globe in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. Data on KBAs are managed in the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas, and are made freely available through the KBA website (and for business users, through the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool. While virtually all countries in the world have some KBAs identified, the new global standard has been applied in just a few (albeit growing) number to date.

KBAs are identified through nationally-led bottom-up processes, typically organised by KBA National Coordination Groups that bring together relevant stakeholders from government, academia, civil society and others. As such they are identified nationally using local data applied to globally standardised criteria that ensure comparability in significance between sites across countries.

KBAs and protected areas and OECMs

The identification of a site as a KBA does not imply any particular form of management, but a significant number have been designated as protected areas, while others are candidates for recognition as OECMs. Currently, 19% of KBAs fall entirely within protected areas or OECMs, 42% have partial coverage, and 39% fall entirely outside such designations. The latter two classes provide biodiversity priorities to target for protected area expansion or OECM recognition, and thus support the achievement of a key component of achieving Target 3. Therefore, completing KBA identification

in each country would enable comprehensive spatial planning to ensure that all sites of particular importance for biodiversity in each country are effectively conserved through protected area and OECM networks.

Using KBAs to inform the expansion of protected area and OECM networks is important because data show that current protected area networks have tended to be designated in remote areas, at high elevations, and in locations that are less suitable for agriculture. As a consequence, protected areas and OECMs have increasingly been designated in places that do not overlap with identified Key Biodiversity Areas. In 2010, 20–30% of protected areas covered sites that were identified as KBAs (Butchart et al. 2012); by 2019, this percentage had declined to 17–18% (Visconti et al. 2019). Another study showed that there could have been a 37-fold improvement in the number of species conserved if the same extent of protected areas had been allocated to maximise species inclusion (Venter et al. 2017).

KBAs have long been used to target site protection efforts. For example, KBAs identified for birds (Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas) heavily influenced the designation of Special Protection Areas under EU legislation (and KBAs have been proposed as criteria for the expansion of protected areas under the European Union Biodiversity strategy). KBAs are also recognised in many National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). A review of 193 countries' NBSAPs and national reports showed that 30% of countries reported on KBAs (this rises to 40% for countries with reports updated since 2016). Of the 6th National Reports (submitted by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity during 2017-2021), nearly one in five (17%) showed that countries had incorporated KBAs into their national targets and objectives within the NBSAP (figure 1). While this is positive progress, there is now an exciting opportunity to increase this focus through the global biodiversity framework.

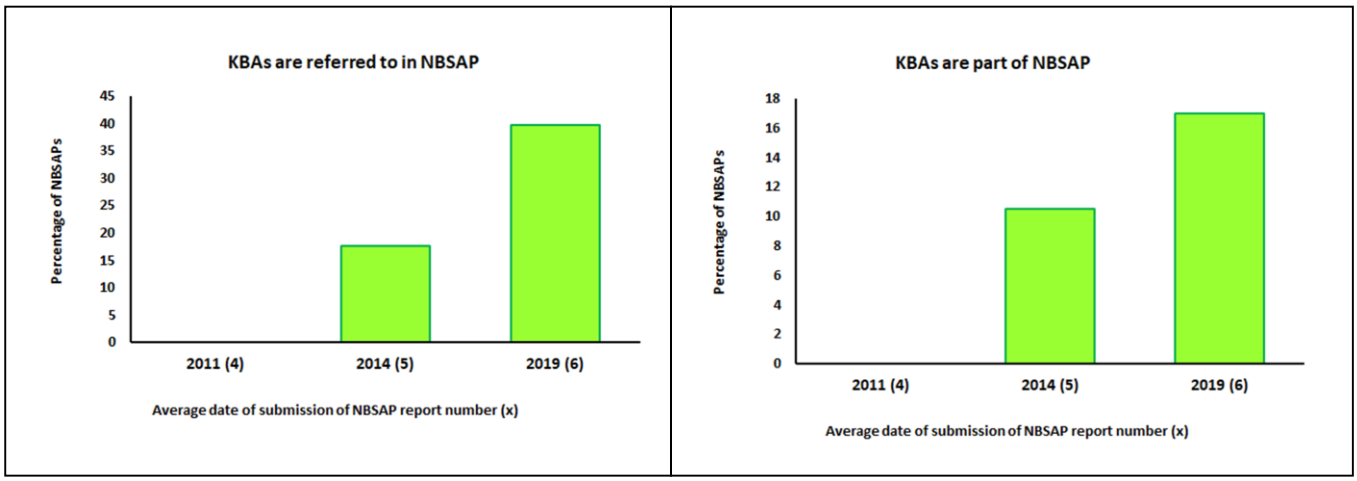

Figure 1. The trend in KBAs being referred to in NBSAPs (left) and being incorporated as target sites within NBSAPs (right)

In addition, KBAs are recognised as 'critical habitat' under the safeguard policies of many financing institutions and have been recognised under the Banks and Biodiversity Principles as no-go areas. Many businesses are using data on KBAs in the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) to minimise biodiversity risks from their business operations.

KBAs in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Targets:

We recommend that KBAs should be specifically mentioned in the following parts of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework text (additions in red):

Target 1. *Ensure that all land and sea areas globally are under integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning addressing land- and sea-use change, retaining existing intact and wilderness areas together with Key Biodiversity Areas and other sites of particular importance for biodiversity*.

Guidance on this target should specifically mention that comprehensive KBA identification and mapping should be a key component of spatial plans as reflected in the IUCN motion 096.

Target 3. *Ensure that at least 30 per cent globally of land areas and of sea areas, especially Key Biodiversity Areas and other areas of particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people, 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 landscapes and seascapes*.

Adding the specific mention of KBAs is important because they provide Parties with an existing set of important sites for the broad range of biodiversity values identified using an internationally agreed common standard. The language of this target is now very close to Aichi Target 11 and it is important we have guidance on where is important so that we don't end up with the same issues listed above after another 10 years.

Indicators:

Headline indicator for target 1: 1.0.1 *Percentage of land and seas covered by spatial plans that integrate biodiversity**

Guidance on this indicator should indicate that comprehensive Identification and mapping of KBAs should form a core component of any spatial plan that integrates biodiversity.

Headline indicator for target 3: 3.0.1 *Coverage of protected areas and OECMS (by Key Biodiversity Areas and Effectiveness)*

While this headline indicator is suggested to be disaggregated by KBAs, we believe KBAs should be explicitly named in the indicator together with effectiveness to ensure representativeness of protection as well as effectiveness is present. IUCN Standards (agreed and accepted by the global conservation community) exist for both KBAs and for identifying effectively governed, managed and planned protected and conserved areas (the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas).

The *Proportion of KBAs in favourable condition* is an additional indicator which is currently being measured and could be used to assess whether effective management is achieving conservation outcomes that are desired under target 3.

Glossary – definition of terms used

We suggest that the glossary (CBD/WG2020/3/3/Add.2) definition for Spatial Planning is adjusted to better reflect the IUCN Motion 096 that was supported by 126 government institutions (100%) and more than 690 non-governmental IUCN partner institutions (99%) as follows:

Spatial planning is generally understood as a method or public process for analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of activities in a given environment in order to achieve various objectives, including social, economic and ecological (such as biodiversity), that have been specified through a political process. Spatial planning includes land-use planning, marine spatial planning, etc.

For the purposes of the post2020 global biodiversity framework spatial planning refers to spatially explicit conservation plans to incorporate sites and areas of importance for the global persistence of biodiversity across multiple taxa and ecosystems (Key Biodiversity Areas and other areas of importance for biodiversity), along with the connectivity required to ensure biodiversity persistence. These spatially explicit plans for biodiversity should be integrated with multi-sectoral plans at a national level to ensure biodiversity conservation is mainstreamed in planning.

(See Metternicht (2017). Land Use and Spatial Planning: Enabling Sustainable Management of Land Resources. SpringerBriefs in Earth Sciences. https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319718606)

We also suggest there is a clear definition in the glossary for 'areas of importance for biodiversity' because this phrasing was used in Aichi target 11 and was not applied well, leading to poor coverage of species and ecosystems.

Areas of importance for biodiversity: *Areas of importance for biodiversity are sites identified using quantitative thresholds for biodiversity elements and standardised criteria that are globally recognised. An example is the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) criteria which were developed through extensive consultation within the conservation community and are now recognised by governments, private sector and conservation community as a good measure of sites of global importance for biodiversity.*

Conclusion

The KBA Partnership is working with governments and organizations around the world to halt the biodiversity crisis. To achieve the CBD Vision of a world living in harmony with nature, expanding networks of PAs and OECMs is essential, but it is critical that these conserve the most important locations for nature. KBAs provide an unparalleled tool for achieving this and should be explicitly mentioned because lessons learned from the past 10 years of the Aichi Targets have shown that targets need to name tools if they are to be successful.