

**ANTARCTIC MARINE CONSERVATION: POLICY AND MARINE PROTECTED AREA SELECTION OPTIONS**

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Marine conservation on the high seas has emerged on the international agenda as a critical issue requiring the application of novel approaches, international cooperation and political will. In the Southern Ocean, science and conservation efforts are hindered by geographic remoteness and a harsh environment. One outcome of these conditions is inadequate data for systematic analysis of conservation potential. This study assesses options for high seas marine conservation under international law within and beyond the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Integrating policy with science provides an appropriate mechanism to identify and develop marine protected areas in the Southern Ocean. This research evaluates the use of surrogates to guide the selection of high priority areas in the Indian Ocean sector of the Southern Ocean. The database spans over 20 years and contains more than 140,000 records of seabird sightings at sea. At sea ranges, species diversity, and the distributions of endangered/vulnerable species may be appropriate selectors to identify areas with high conservation values.

The high seas are in urgent need of conservation, and the most appropriate way forward is to operate within the context of the ATS. The ATS should cooperate with key international instruments, namely the Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to ensure that the ATS maintains its status of being amongst the most comprehensively protected regions of the world. The use and analysis of seabird at sea data has identified high priority areas for possible conservation action, in particular those nearby Kerguelen and Heard Islands. Further data collection is required to confirm the key conservation values and assess the need for additional management measures. Collaboration with key stakeholders is required to formulate an appropriate action plan based upon detailed knowledge of the region and current/future likely uses of the region.