

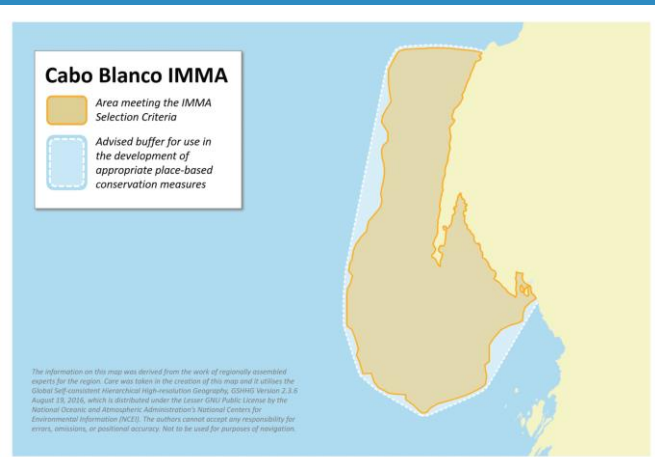
# Cabo Blanco IMMA

## Description:

The IMMA includes long open beaches, and several cliffy areas of 10-20 meters height. Cliff areas hold marine caves of different suitability for seals. The Cabo Blanco monk seal colony use the three most suitable caves on the whole coast located in the west coast of the Cabo Blanco peninsula. The marine area of the IMMA is characterized by the permanent presence of an upwelling, and its high primary production. It is considered as one of the most productive fishing grounds of the world.

Inside the IMMA, there are several marine and coastal protected areas of different characteristics but all of them focused on monk seal protection. One of them is the reserve "Costa de las Focas", that protects the breeding caves and nearby vicinities from illegal fishing and seeks to avoid presence of people and disturbances in the coastal area. Another protected area is the Reserve Satellite de Cap Blanc, established by Mauritania at the tip of the peninsula to protect several adult males that use the waters below the cliffy area to defend aquatic territories and beaches to haul out. Nevertheless, despite the protection measures, some degree of illegal artisan and industrial fishing activity occurs regularly in the IMMA.

The different protection measures developed in the area and the actions towards the involvement of local communities developed under the Monk Seal Action Plan for the Recovery of Mediterranean Monk Seal in the Eastern Atlantic (CMS/UNEP) has helped the monk seal population to progressively increase in the IMMA from 100 animals estimated in 1998 (Forcada et al., 1999) to more than 350 estimated in 2018 (CBD-Habitat, 2018).



## Area Size

19 333 km<sup>2</sup>

## Qualifying Species and Criteria

Mediterranean Monk Seal – *Monachus monachus*

Criterion A; B (2); C (1)

## Summary

One of the largest Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) populations that still survive in the world is located in the area of Cabo Blanco. The area comprises the coast of the Cabo Blanco peninsula and Guerguerat region, between both Mauritania and Morocco, from Cabo Barbas to Cabo Blanco, as well as the surrounding waters up to 25 nm offshore. The three caves currently used by the seals for breeding and hauling out are located in 1 km of coast of the Cabo Blanco peninsula, inside a marine and coastal participative reserve named "Costa de las Focas". The marine area is also currently used by monk seals for other activities such as foraging. The IMMA contains several Special Areas of Conservation for monk seals (SACMS) designated under the Action Plan for the Recovery of the Mediterranean monk seal in the Eastern Atlantic (CMS/UNEP).



Figure 1: Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) mother and pup at Costa de las Focas, Cabo Blanco peninsula. Photo credit: CBD-Habitat

## **Criterion A: Species or Population Vulnerability**

The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is classified as an Endangered Species on the IUCN Red List. The IMMA contains some of the most important habitat for its survival and future recovery, since it contains nearly half the global population of the species, as well as the entirety of the foraging and breeding habitat of the local occurring population.

## **Criterion B: Distribution and Abundance** **Sub-criterion B2: Aggregations**

The IMMA supports the whole known foraging and breeding habitat of the monk seal population inhabiting this region. It is estimated that in 2018 more than 350 monk seals were located in area (CBD-Habitat, 2018), representing one of the single largest aggregation of the species. In particular the Cabo Blanco colony uses the three most suitable caves for their reproduction, further aggregating these animals into dense areas.

## Criterion C: Key Life Cycle Activities

### Sub-criterion C1: Reproductive Areas

Cliffy areas in the IMMA include marine caves of different suitability for seals. The Cabo Blanco monk seal colony use the three most suitable caves of the whole coast from Cabo Barbas to Cabo Blanco, located in the west coast of the Cabo Blanco peninsula. Some other cliffy areas are used by monk seal individuals, mostly adult males, to defend aquatic territories and to haul out in some beaches below the cliffs. The marine area is characterized by the permanent presence of an upwelling, and its high

primary production. It is considered as one of the most productive fishing grounds of the world. All the current reproductive areas, as well as potential new ones are included in the IMMA. The IMMA comprises the only 3 caves used by the seals for breeding, as well as the aquatic territories defended by adult males with possibly reproductive objectives. In addition, all foraging by the different age categories of the resident monk seal population is conducted with the IMMA thereby further enhancing the importance of the area to the pupping and weaning of young monk seals.



Figure 2: Conservation agent at "Costa de las Focas" reserve. Photo credit: CBD-Habitat



## Supporting Information

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