Title

In EU waters, as in other parts of the world, the extent of site protection for birds and other marine life is unacceptably low and it is one of our highest priorities to remedy this. BirdLife has been working towards the identification of marine biodiversity areas since the late nineties and is therefore leading the mapping of all these areas globally. Learn which Marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) apply to your country. The identification of Marine IBAs makes a vital contribution to global initiatives to improve protection and sustainable management of the oceans.

Marine IBAs are chosen using strict, globally agreed criteria. They are the basis to give legal protection to bird hotspots in the EU, by formally designating Natura 2000 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive. BirdLife's IBA inventory is the internationally accepted benchmark, repeatedly recognised by the European Court of Justice as the relevant scientific reference for the designation of these sites. Despite this, only 2% of European seas are protected as marine SPAs, even though the Birds Directive has now been in force for 33 years.

Birdlife has carried out an analysis of the overlap of the existing European SPA network with the BirdLife European IBA network, which includes terrestrial and marine sites and is a good indicator of the sufficiency of the legal designation of SPAs in the Member States. A key part of Birdlife's work is therefore to continue promoting and ensuring the safeguarding of Marine IBAs as legally protected sites.

Related Topics

- Why we work on Marine and Fisheries Policy
- Marine Natura 2000 sites

- Protecting Seabirds and Marine ecosystems
- Marine Protected Areas
- Sustainable fisheries
- Seabird bycatch in fishing gear
- Back to Seabirds and Marine

Special Protection Areas (SPAs), terrestrial and marine, part of the Natura 2000 network,are designated under the EU Birds Directive (1979) for the protection of 181 bird species, subspecies or populations, including seabirds, that are considered the most threatened in Europe, as well as for all other migratory bird species and for all wetlands of international importance (Ramsar Sites).

Stichting BirdLife Europe gratefully acknowledges financial support from the European Commission. All content and opinions expressed on these pages are solely those of Stichting BirdLife Europe.