IUCN-WCPA Marine Connectivity Working Group (MCWG) Work Plan 2023-2024/5

Overall Goal: advancing the mission and objectives of the Marine Connectivity Working Group of the IUCN-WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group and, in support of this goal, facilitate and identify specific roles of MCWG members with guidance, as appropriate, from the Secretariat.

Content: This work plan identifies proposed projects, activities, and membership roles for 2023-2024, subject to available resources, unanticipated events, and special priorities in particular member venues. Each of the projects and activities will be developed and implemented to support one or more of the four core objectives of MCWG (science, planning, governance/participation, communication/technical support). Implementation of each item will be guided and coordinated, where appropriate and feasible, by an Executive Committee member.

New projects:

1. Grow membership – significantly expand MCWG membership, including creation of a young professional's group, and possible subgroups of members with particular specialties coordinated by Executive Committee members or other members interested in this role.

   Strategy: All members are urged to identify potential candidates with whom they work, introduce MCWG, and actively encourage them to join. Members also should strive to identify young professionals studying or beginning careers in marine conservation and encourage them also to join. Members in education or training will be key to helping recruit young professionals. To assist in promoting MCWG membership, the MCWG Chair working with the Secretariat will prepare and circulate a short PPT on MCWG and its important role in marine conservation and connectivity, with a small supplement directed specifically to young professionals and the value of MCWG to their work and career.

   Timeline/goal: Considering that the ocean is about 70% of the planet, the goal is to increase MCWG membership significantly during the work plan period to better reflect this planetary scope (by comparison, CCSG with its terrestrial focus has some 1000 members, while MCWG currently has only about 100 members). This activity will continue beyond the present work plan period.

2. Support new international developments in ocean conservation:
   a. Advance in each member's area of influence the CBD Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Goals and Targets, particularly Target 3 calling for at least 30% protection of coastal and marine areas by 2030 "through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas". (see full document here: https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf).
   b. Collaborating with partners, including CBD, WCPA's task force, and UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), to help develop guidance and operationalize indicators required for meeting the 30% target on the ground and for incorporating and tracking the extent that marine connectivity is being addressed.

3. Promote ratification and implementation within each member's area of influence of the new Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty, also known as the High Seas Treaty; see at: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N23/177/28/PDF/N2317728.pdf?OpenElement

4. Monitor and where possible report developments on emerging issues in MPA design, management, law, and policy regarding connectivity need in response to a changing climate, including how to accommodate and protect species range shifts when these may extend beyond formal MPA boundaries.

Ongoing projects:

1. Continue to ground test the ROTs (e.g., through one or more workshops with a specific MPA, and possibly focal species); and continue to develop guidance on inclusion of connectivity within design and management of new MPAs, consider revision of the Rules of Thumb version 1, to reflect these updates in a version 2.

(Members who are MPA practitioners, researchers, and science and technology specialists will be especially encouraged to give special attention to this and the next activity.)

2. Regarding existing or newly designated MPAs, continue to identify, assess, report, and share information (including through workshops and webinars) on species and ecosystem connectivity needs and associated legal, management, and monitoring responses, including special challenges, science gaps, and technology needs.

3. Through basecamp and individual links, continue to share research and publications, including on such topics as modelling and use of remote technology to define MPA size and location for specific conservation objectives and associated connectivity needs; identifying blue corridors for major migratory species; deep ocean ecological connectivity; seascape ecology to support connectivity through corridors, patches, stepping stones or other spatial marine linkages; restoring/maintaining marine genetic diversity to support ecological connectivity; and generally activities that advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 14: to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development".

4. Continue contributing marine connectivity expertise toward promoting and executing the 2020 IUCN *Guidelines for Conserving Connectivity through Ecological Networks and Corridors* and *Marine Connectivity Conservation 'Rules of Thumb' for MPA and MPA Network Design,* including identifying and preparing MPA case studies with ecological networks and corridors, and undertaking ground-testing workshops in diverse field locations.

5. Continue to monitor and participate, where appropriate, in international/regional/local events, including key conferences, meetings, working groups, and local and global webinars, contributing guidance and information on marine connectivity aspects. At the international and regional levels, certain ongoing and upcoming events are particularly important, including the following:

   Key upcoming International/Regional events to monitor and where feasible contribute or attend --
   - 14th COP of the Convention on Migratory Species, October 2023.
   - 16th COP of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2024, as well as relevant meetings of the CBD's subsidiary bodies.
   - The CBD new Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) and measures to harmonize and strengthen rules and roles of the regional fisheries management organizations.
   - Decision-making processes and activities of the International Seabed Authority related to ensuring protection of Key Marine Biodiversity Areas in the deep sea (including hydrothermal vents, seamounts, and cold water corals) and associated species connectivity.
   - Providing input to preparatory documents and meetings for the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress.
   - Monitoring and supporting, where possible, UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanography Commission initiatives to advance the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).
   - Monitoring and supporting the 2022 WTO agreement to end harmful fisheries subsidies compromising fish populations and damaging the marine environment, including ecological connectivity.

   (The Secretariat and MCWG Chair will endeavor to continue the tables of relevant international events.)

Funding: Significant in-kind support is being provided by MCWG members to the mission and activities of MCWG, and this is essential. The CCSG Secretariat (staffed by the Center for Large Landscape Conservation) will continue to provide assistance, particularly with administration and representation, but has very limited funds for projects. Substantive projects important for advancing MCWG's mission require additional funding. All members are encouraged to continue to be alert to, share information, and apply for funding where opportunities arise, including especially for projects involving collaboration among members. This effort may include philanthropies, development banks, donor countries, and private financial investment firms developing sustainable investments, normally through Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) funds or investment packages. The Secretariat will do the same.