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WWF-UK RESPONSE TO SOUTH GEORGIA & THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS MARINE PROTECTED AREA 5-YEAR REVIEW

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SUMMARY

WWF-UK welcomes the considerable progress made in the protection and environmental stewardship of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) maritime zone through the establishment of an IUCN Category IV Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2012 and the continued commitment evidenced the following year in 2013 through the incorporation of additional conservation measures.

WWF-UK now calls on the G-SGSSI to further enhance this MPA to achieve the 2016-2020 headline strategy objective of “World-class environmental management underpinned by the highest standards of governance” to further reduce and mitigate the possible impact of human activities on this globally important ecosystem. WWF looks forward to participating fully in the consultation process. Here, we focus on 4 key areas for action: i. fuller stakeholder engagement in research and monitoring of the MPA; ii. assessing the sustainability of the krill fishery; iii. banning the use and carriage of Heavy Fuel Oils by 2020 and; iv. developing legislation to indefinitely prohibit any commercial mineral resource activity.

WWF-UK RESPONSE TO SOUTH GEORGIA & THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS MARINE PROTECTED AREA 5-YEAR REVIEW

WWF-UK is grateful for the opportunity to provide advice on the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Marine Protected Area 5-year review.

WWF-UK would like to acknowledge the considerable progress made on the protection and environmental stewardship of the SGSSI maritime zone through the initial designation of the MPA in 2012 and its enhancement in 2013.

Submissions for the 5-year review are requested to focus on the monitoring and effectiveness of the MPA, contribute to future research priorities, and provide evidence-based suggestions for current management measure revisions. Within this remit, WWF-UK would like to highlight 4 areas where the opportunity exists to further reduce and mitigate the risks posed by human activity within the MPA, and to enhance the environmental and biodiversity protection of the area. In previous consultations about the SGSSI MPA, WWF-UK called for a commitment to continuous improvement in the ecosystem-based management and design



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of the MPA, including the identification of further areas, based on scientific evidence and the precautionary approach, that should be closed to commercial fishing where there is clear benefit to conservation.

1. We encourage G-SGSSI to provide the MPA review panel with a detailed list of science and monitoring activity that has been stimulated by the designation of the MPA in 2012, indicating those areas that go beyond 'business as usual' (noting that the South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf IUCN Category 1A MPA, adopted by CCAMLR following a UK-led proposal, has served as a 'honeypot' attracting research funding during a similar 5 year timeframe).

1.1. WWF-UK participated in the South Georgia MPA data prioritisation workshop hosted by British Antarctic Survey in May 2107. It is important that the outputs of that science workshop are provided to stakeholders to consider and effectively contribute towards the MPA review, in particular concerning the status and trends of marine biodiversity within the area.

2. The level of uncertainty around the sustainability of Antarctic krill fishing within the SGSSI MPA needs to be addressed with urgency. The 2016-2020 strategy identifies the commitment to "conduct further research to consider the merits of a quota or catch- based system, with a degree of spatial management".

2.1. The current management of the Antarctic krill fishery in Area 48 was set up as an interim measure by CCAMLR, and, whilst highly precautionary, is not directly related to the krill biomass status.

2.2. Furthermore, the last survey estimating biomass was conducted in 2000. This is an area which needs urgent attention to develop a management system founded on a spatially explicit, ecosystem-based assessment of biomass, and highly precautionary accounting for predator requirements and possible climate change impacts.

2.3. Until such a time, any fishing for krill should remain very highly precautionary, given the importance of krill to a variety of marine mammals and avian wildlife living within or annually migrating through the SGSSI MPA which rely on krill as a food source.

2.4. The G-SGSSI strategy states support to Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accredited krill fishing companies. However, it poses challenges for individual companies acting on best intentions to be declared as sustainably fishing for krill when the status of the krill is unknown and each company is likely to be a sub-component of the wider fishery with the risks of local depletion. Individual vessels operating with best practices within a wider fishery does not guarantee sustainability of the fishery as a whole. As a priority for the effective management of the MPA, the krill fishery as a whole should be assessed to deem whether it is sustainable, or spatially explicit zones identified as sustainable.

2.5. Furthermore, the dependence of some penguin species inhabiting South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands on krill as a food source must be adequately addressed in the context of the krill fishery. Under the MPA Order of 2013, in addition to a complete no-take zone of 12nm surrounding South Georgia for the protection of Gentoo penguins amongst other birds, pelagic (including krill) fishing is prohibited within 12nm of land around the

South Sandwich Islands for the protection of the “pelagic ecosystem and dependant predators” specifically identifying chinstrap and Adélie penguins. These measures are intended to allow foraging for SGSSI seabirds free from human competition. It is paramount that G-SGSSI takes account of existing research and supports, and where necessary commissions, comprehensive new research to determine whether this 12nm spatial limit, and the existing temporal closures, are sufficiently precautionary for all dependant species, or whether additional closed areas are required.

3. The use and carriage of Heavy Fuel Oil in South Georgia waters, and associated bunkering, should be banned by 2020. The UK Government supported the 2011 International Maritime Organisation (IMO) ban on the use and carriage of heavy fuel oil (HFO) in the adjacent Antarctic Treaty Area through the provisions of MARPOL Annex I, Chapter 9, Regulation 43. In this respect, and despite advice provided by WWF-UK to previous consultation, G-SGSSI has fallen behind the curve and continues to operate to a lower standard than the adjacent Antarctic Treaty Area.

3.1. A major spill of HFO presents one of the most significant threats from shipping in the waters of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. Such a spill could have significant long term effects on local marine ecosystems. HFOs are thick, viscous fuels which degrade slowly under sub-Antarctic conditions. Evaporation and dispersion rates are low compared to lighter, refined fuels. It may emulsify once released into the marine environment, and it is impossible to effectively clean up HFO in ice-infested waters in typical sub-Antarctic conditions and with a lack of nearby comprehensive response resources and infrastructure. Degradation of the environment from a major spill could result in loss of revenue from tourism or fisheries, and damage the reputation of G-SGSSI.

3.2. WWF-UK welcomes the 2017 report on *Heavy Fuel Oil and Bunkering Activity in the South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands Maritime Zone* commissioned by G-SGSSI to evaluate the risk of use, carriage, and bunkering of HFO within the SGSSI MPA. The report highlighted these HFO activities as having “critical” and “high” risks to the environment.

3.3. This issue has been under consideration for some time. The Management Plan for the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands MPA, first released in February 2012, stated that ‘*GSGSSI is considering restricting the use and carriage of heavy fuels in inshore waters around South Georgia*’. Previously, G-SGSSI had considered a strategy objective for the fishery to ‘*Consider the prohibition of the carriage and use of heavy fuel by all fishing vessels in the SGSSI MPA by 2020*’.

3.4. It is now time to act on this significant issue. WWF-UK would therefore encourage G-SGSSI to demonstrate their commitment by rapidly progressing the phasing out and subsequent ban on the use, carriage, and bunkering of HFO (including intermediate fuel) by all vessels operating within the SGSSI maritime zone by 2020.

3.5. Continuation of such activities within the MPA beyond 2020 would necessarily imply a failure to meet the strategic objective of achieving “world-class environmental management” by 2020.

3.6. The same report also highlighted the inability of G-SGSSI to respond to and manage even a medium sized oil spill within the MPA. The nearest major equipment and expertise to

deal with such a spill is 800nm away, around 5 days by vessel, on the Falkland Islands. To permit such activity without the ability to deal with even a medium sized oil spill, where such a spill could have a significant, long term impact on the environment and biodiversity is not compatible with G-SGSSIs stated goals. The report further highlights the inability of SGSSI to deal with the consequences of a spill in its lack of seabird rehabilitation facilities, again the nearest is on the Falkland Islands. This further supports the necessity of banning the use, carriage, and bunkering of heavy fuel oil by all vessels operating within the SGSSI MPA to mitigate the "critical" and "high" risks this activities poses to the environment.

4. GSGSSI should bring legislation into force to ensure a simple, direct and enduring prohibition on any commercial mineral resource activity covering the entire area of the MPA (as well as terrestrial areas) in line with its commitment to achieving "world-class environmental management".

4.1. In the adjacent Antarctic Treaty Area, there is a complete and indefinite prohibition on all commercial mineral resource activities, under Article 7 of the *Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty* (1991). WWF-UK appreciates the inclusion of such a prohibition in the current SGSSI strategy following previous consultation, but we view the lack of legislation in this area as a major gap which must be filled in order to meet the principal conservation objective (c) of the MPA Order of 2013 being "to manage other human activities including shipping and scientific research to minimise environmental impacts on the marine environment".

For WWF-UK, enhancing the protection of the biodiversity of SGSSI by strengthening the provisions of the MPA, as well as closing the legislative gaps on HFO and mineral resource activity, would help to better meet the objectives of the MPA and to further the progress that has been made on conservation and stewardship of this globally important biodiversity hotspot in the Southern Ocean.

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