



Questions & Answers

About Key Biodiversity Areas in South Africa

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Q: What are Key Biodiversity Areas and how are they identified?

A: Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) are 'sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity', in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. The Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (IUCN 2016) sets out globally agreed criteria for the identification of KBAs worldwide. The KBA Standard establishes a consultative, science-based process for KBA identification, founded on the consistent application of global criteria with quantitative thresholds that have been developed through an extensive consultation exercise spanning several years.

Further reading: <http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/home>

Q: Who identifies KBAs:

The intention is that KBAs are proposed and identified from the bottom up by local experts or private and government organisations. For this purpose, KBA National Coordination Groups (NCG) are established to facilitate this process nationally. The KBA Secretariat provides technical assistance through the placement of Regional Focal Points who work closely with NCGs to review KBA proposals before they are submitted to the KBA Secretariat.

Q: How will the existing KBAs be assessed?

A: There is an existing network of KBAs which is constituted of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites, and previously identified Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) KBAs in South Africa; and there is a wealth of experience and input that has gone into these sites being identified. However, South Africa needs to now apply the new KBA Standard (2016) against these existing KBAs to verify their KBA status. We have an 8-year window to do this verification and inform the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (WDKBA) whether these sites qualify or not. This is a priority for the South African National Coordination Group (NCG) as it will be important to not leave these existing KBAs as the only ones being reported upon nationally and internationally. This review process will be undertaken during the national KBA revision and delineation analysis, which will take place in 2018 and 2019. The South African NCG, through SANBI, will contract an expert to identify the initial KBA network in South Africa, which will include revising the current network.

Q: The process of identifying new KBAs?

A: Countries that have the data can do one substantial KBA delineation exercise, but basically the process allows anyone to propose a new KBA at any time. Any individual or organisation can propose a new KBA. All new KBA proposals will be reviewed by the NCG who, once happy, will submit the proposal to the KBA Regional Focal Point (RFP appointed by the KBA Secretariat). External expert input/s may also be requested by the NCG or RFP. Once all data requirements have been satisfied, the KBA proposal will be submitted to the KBA Secretariat for final approval and loading onto the World Database for KBAs. The KBA Technical Working group, through the KBA Secretariat, will publish KBA Technical Guidelines to guide the delineation of new or existing KBAs to accommodate more taxa.

Q: Should we be supporting other countries to set up their NCGs?

A: South Africa was the first country to initiate and set up their NCG, and has subsequently supported the establishment of NCGs in Australia, Canada, and elsewhere. South Africa will continue to play a role in lesson sharing and supporting other country NCGs. BirdLife South Africa is the Africa representative and chair of the KBA Community, which will assist in sharing lessons between countries. Once appointed, the KBA Regional Focal Points will assist NCGs with KBA identification and proposals. The Biodiversity Assessment for Spatial Prioritisation in Africa (BASPA) project, is an IUCN-BirdLife South Africa partnership which will support regional Red Listing and KBA identification in three African countries.

Q: What is the value add of KBAs in the process of assessment and planning in South Africa, where we have a well-developed network of sophisticated, systematic biodiversity plans?

A: One of the really interesting things about global standards is that they allow for inter-country comparisons. The extensive and numerous KBAs that are likely to be delineated in mega-diverse countries (like South Africa and Colombia) will serve to reinforce how unique these countries are and it will improve our international profile. For international programs such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) - KBAs be useful in computation of global indicators. The existing biodiversity priority areas (Critical Biodiversity Areas) identified through the various systematic biodiversity plans at a provincial and district level in South Africa will remain the key input to land use planning and decision making as these products take into account many more factors than biodiversity pattern alone. Biodiversity planning scientists in South Africa are investigating the ways in which KBAs and systematic planning can intersect in future plans. There is also a journal paper in-press which investigates this relationship further. South Africa can therefore make valuable contributions to this discussion.

Q: Will KBAs mean larger areas are identified for national protected area expansion?

A: Future protected areas expansion strategies (PAES) developed by provincial conservation bodies may well take KBAs into account. In fact, the majority of the areas included in the current expansion plans are likely to qualify as KBAs. This means that in future KBAs may be used as a motivation for protected areas expansion but the areas targeted are likely to stay much the same.

Q: How does the Red List of Ecosystems fit in to KBAs and the need for inter-country comparisons?

A: The KBA Standard includes criteria on threatened species and ecosystems together with criteria on rare and restricted range species, small ecosystems and others. This means that the threatened ecosystems identified in South Africa will be a subset of the KBAs delineated. Both can be used for country comparison but KBAs would be a more comprehensive way of comparing biodiversity status between different countries.

Q: The communication of these concepts to various audiences going forward will be important, as we will need to be clear on the distinction between CBAs, KBAs, AZEs, etc.

A: Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) and Ecosystem Support Areas (ESAs) are already important conservation spatial prioritisation products, and at the national level we should avoid KBAs potentially being confused with these products. While there is no doubt that South Africa should pursue the KBA work due to its international benefits, the NCG will guide the planning sector to support the beneficial integration and dovetailing of KBAs into spatial planning, and avoid confusion or duplication. The NCG could potentially put together a manual of operations for the rationalisation of KBAs with CBAs and EBAs.

Q: Would the national KBA function need to incorporate provincial bodies?

A: The KBA process is definitely a community effort and similar to the species red listing process where many experts are involved. The identification of KBAs will require input and evidence from the community of partners, and many of the technical aspects will need to be taken up by the provincial planners. SANBI will coordinate efforts with provincial authorities and taxa experts.

Q: Is there is an expectation of reporting on trends for KBAs, and will there be an expectation of the taxonomic experts being very involved in such monitoring and reporting?

A: This is an important point, and the burden of time on both species and ecosystem experts might be considerable. The NCG needs to investigate the monitoring and reporting required for KBAs once these requirements have been clarified by the global KBA Committee.