

Marine and Coastal Critical Biodiversity Area (CBA) Map

Stakeholder Dialogues: Towards Iterative Updates

Online 27 January 2026

In-person 12 February 2026

DRAFT REPORT



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Note that this DRAFT Report will be finalised and released once inputs have been elicited and received from workshop participants. Expected release date is 15 April 2026.

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Executive summary

The South African National Biodiversity Institute initiated a process in January 2026 to co-develop plans to update the national marine and coastal Map of Critical Biodiversity Areas and Ecological Support Areas (CBA Map). A CBA Map is a spatial plan for conserving biodiversity and maintaining an ecologically well-functioning landscape or seascape. As such, in the marine context, the CBA Map is the output of a science-based spatial plan that identifies areas of importance for marine biodiversity. It serves as an input layer into broader spatial planning and stakeholder processes, rather than as a final decision-making tool. The CBA Map is intended to be iteratively updated through participatory stakeholder engagement, research, and systematic conservation planning. The current marine and coastal CBA Map was produced in 2022 and work to prepare updated CBA Maps is underway. Since 2022 new data, perspectives from rights holders, knowledge holders, planners and other stakeholders, and lessons from previous and current processes, have been emerging. To shape the process and plans for updating the CBA Map, two stakeholder dialogue sessions were held, one online (27 January 2026), and one in person session at Kirstenbosch (12 February 2026). The purpose of these sessions were to:

1. Build an improved understanding of the purpose, methods and development process for the CBA Map
2. Jointly review input data and progress in marine spatial biodiversity planning to date
3. Help shape a participatory process for iteratively improving and updating the CBA Map
4. Identify key priorities for improved communication and participation in the identification of important biodiversity areas in South Africa's oceans
5. Identify concerns, opportunities, and priorities for further CBA Map updates

The stakeholder dialogues were structured in four sessions designed to (1) provide background and context to the work; (2) discuss progress, challenges, opportunities and concerns; (3) identify priorities and key considerations in co-developing process steps to keep improving the CBA Map and (4) reflect on what had emerged through the stakeholder dialogues and next steps. In response to the need for a more participatory process, seven different approaches were used to support inclusive knowledge exchange and obtain feedback from participants. These included collecting information prior to the meetings, verbal and written inputs during the meetings, smaller group discussions, polls using Menti-meter, and online google forms used during both meetings and post-meeting follow-ups. The online session was hosted on Microsoft Teams and during the meeting, the Teams meeting chat and the Question and Answers function strengthened stakeholder dialogue with 11 facilitated break-out groups supporting focused discussions in smaller groups. A 'parking lot' was established during both online and in-person dialogues to ensure that key issues beyond the focus of the sessions were documented for further discussion at a later stage.

In total, 136 individuals participated in the two meetings, including 31 individuals who attended both meetings while 103 and 64 individuals participated in only the online or the in-person gathering, respectively. Participant gender representation comprised of 62 women and 41 men during the online session while the in-person session had equal representation of women and men. Most participants who attended the stakeholder dialogues were from the conservation sector, Indigenous People, commercial industries, and national and provincial government.

Development partners, local government (municipalities), recreational sectors, and social justice NGOs were the least represented stakeholder groups.

Progress was made in terms of advancing the understanding of this complex body of work with stakeholders making recommendations to further improve the understanding of the CBA Map and how it is developed and used, while also requesting improved communication and clarity. The technical scope and volume of data involved were key challenges that participants identified. Other concerns were about meaningful participation and ensuring an stakeholder inclusive spatial planning process . In focused groups, the following challenges were identified:

- Impact of CBAs on sector activities and access to marine resources.
- Data coverage challenges – non-systematic data collection leads to bias in priority area identification.
- Need for more meaningful participation.
- Increased clarity on the terminology used, and the need to adapt communication for the audience.
- Timelines for the CBA Map update, especially in relation to the MSP process.
- Links between development processes (e.g. ports and harbours), spatial biodiversity priorities and measures, and environmental authorisations.
- The omission of Indigenous People, small-scale fishers and areas of cultural importance in spatial planning processes.

Knowledge holders, rights holders and participants placed a particular emphasis on the importance of ensuring that multiple knowledge systems, rights, and values are adequately recognized and integrated into the iterative updates of the CBA Map, and increased skills and capacity was highlighted as a key enabling factor. It was noted that meaningful stakeholder inclusion requires adequate human, financial, and institutional resources to ensure sufficient support for participatory processes, coordination across overlapping marine planning initiatives, and enable previously marginalized and underrepresented groups to engage effectively in the process.

Recommendations for further improving the CBA Map and update process included:

- include Indigenous Knowledge,
- include spatial priorities of small-scale fishers and customary users,
- address communication challenges by using simplified and clarified terminology, multiple media, a visual approach, diversified language and innovative communication approaches and tools,
- ensure regular feedback to stakeholders throughout the CBA Map update process,
- improve co-ordination between synergistic and overlapping spatial planning processes to avoid stakeholder confusion and fatigue,
- advance focused sector-specific engagements.

The most important priority that emerged in the online meeting was the need for regular report back to keep stakeholders updated, followed by the need for smaller, more focused sector-specific engagements, and then creating more opportunities to incorporate data that have not

previously been included in the CBA Map. Linked to this, strengthening climate resilience within the CBA process was mentioned as key, noting that spatial planning should not rely solely on current biodiversity patterns but must also account for future climate impacts. Incorporating forward looking data such as information on ecosystem vulnerability, shifting species distributions, ocean warming, and long-term environmental change, was seen as essential to enable more adaptive and responsive spatial planning and to increase the consideration of climate resilience within biodiversity and ocean governance processes.

Similar reflections and priorities emerged in both sessions, and these re-iterated the lessons, gaps and priorities that have been reflected in marine protected areas, marine spatial planning and marine biodiversity planning discussions since 2019. Some of the other key priorities included bringing all stakeholders to a similar understanding of what CBAs are and what they are not, how to apply them and how to contribute to their development. Investing in mature relationships was high on the list. Key topics in the parking lot included estuarine Critical Biodiversity Areas, offsets and buffer zones, broader discussions on Marine Spatial Planning, participation in Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and the need to enable co-management in the marine realm.

The sessions were constructive and were closed with appreciation for the participants' engagement, time, interest, insights and inputs.