

# Protecting the Southern Ocean

## Why do we need a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Weddell Sea Region?

### Ocean under Pressure

The Southern Ocean around Antarctica plays a crucial role for the world's climate. Even though great parts are covered by ice for most of the year and conditions are harsh, they are teeming with life. But these remote waters have come under increased pressure by mankind: climate change, fishing, pollution and increased shipping lead to large scale environmental changes, including a loss of the unique Antarctic biodiversity. It is crucial for the entire planet to protect and preserve the Southern Ocean.

### MPAs in the Southern Ocean

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) is responsible for designating and regulating MPAs in the Southern Ocean. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development called for MPA networks until 2012, a target which was later on extended to 2020 in accordance with UN Sustainable Development Goal 14. In 2009, CCAMLR Members agreed to create a representative network of MPAs in Antarctic waters by 2012. MPAs were established in the South Orkney Islands (2009) and in the Ross Sea region (2016). But since then the adoption of further proposals for urgently needed MPAs in the regions of East Antarctica, the Antarctic Peninsula and the Weddell Sea (WSMPA) has stalled. At present, only 7 % of the Southern Ocean is protected.

### Why do we need a Weddell Sea MPA?

The Weddell Sea is one of the most pristine parts of the Southern Ocean. It provides essential habitats that are key for the functional integrity and viability of Antarctic ecosystems. Large reef-like associations of sponges, hydroids and bryozoans (see picture below) are examples of the vulnerable benthic ecosystem. Antarctic krill and the herring-like silverfish represent key mid-level trophic species. They are the main food source for species on the upper trophic level in the Antarctic food web, including Antarctic toothfish and several whale species. The breeding and nesting colonies of top predators such as penguins and seals are essential for the pelagic ecosystem.

### How has the WSMPA progressed so far?

The Weddell Sea MPA proposal is based on a set of scientific background papers developed by German scientists with support by the relevant ministries. It was first proposed by the European Union and its Member States in 2016. Unfortunately, since then CCAMLR was unable to reach consensus on the implementation of the WSMPA. In 2019, Norway joined the WSMPA proposal as a Co-proponent while the proposal was split into 2 phases. For upcoming negotiations new strategies are needed to improve the chances for the required consensus.

**Watch a video about the Weddell Sea MPA here.** (produced for CCAMLR by AWI, 2017)



Fig. 1 The Weddell Seal is an endemic species in the Antarctic Ecosystem. (Source: S. Kambor)

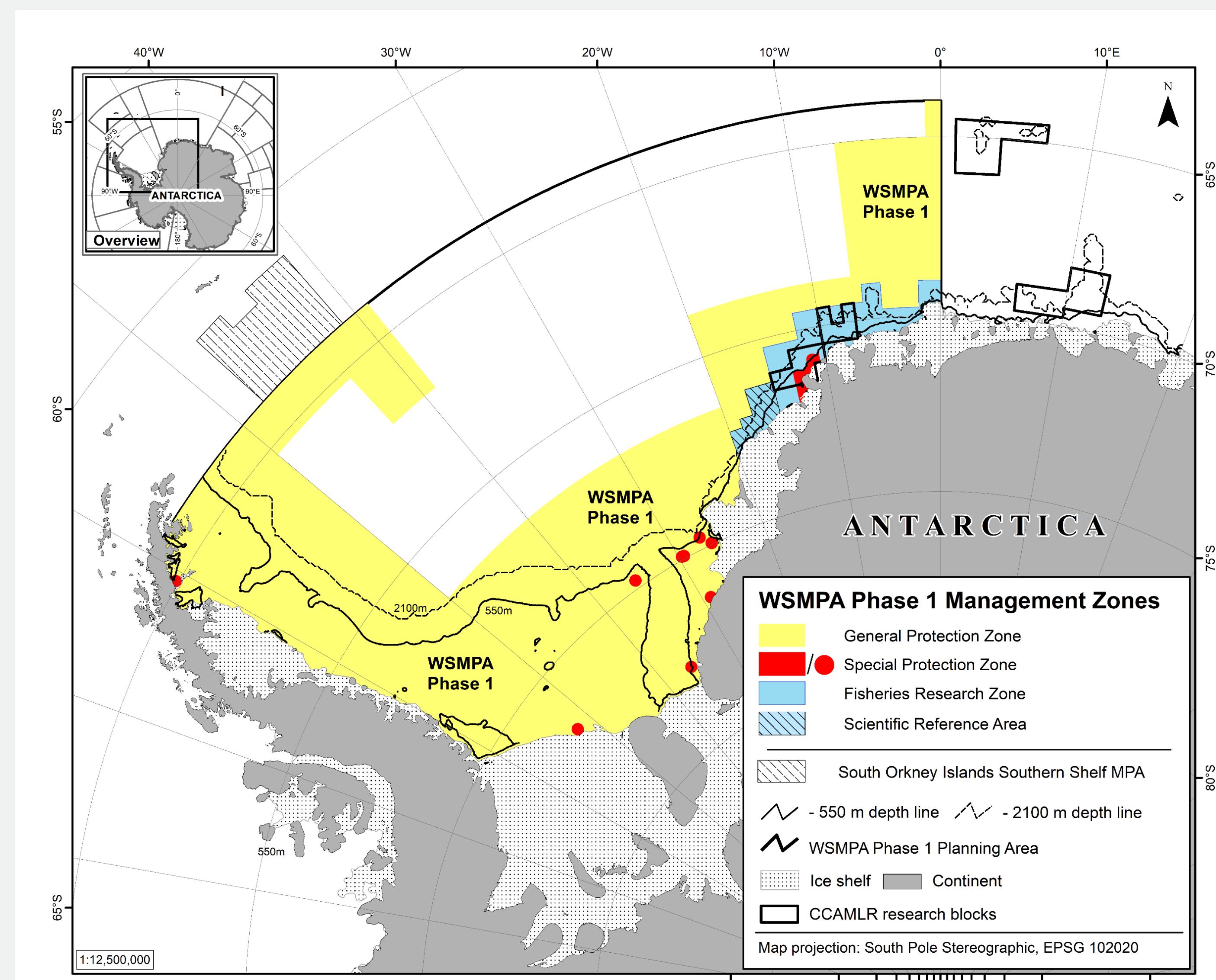


Fig. 2 The Weddell Sea MPA and its management zones (as proposed in 2019). The area of the General Protection Zone (GPZ) covers an area of 2.2 million km<sup>2</sup>, which is about half the size of the European Union.

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