

Namibe (Formerly Kunene-Tigres)

Revised EBSA Description

General Information

Summary

Namibe is a trans-boundary area shared by Namibia and Angola. The EBSA is a modification, and extension of the original Kunene-Tigres EBSA. The Kunene River, its mouth and associated wetland influence the salinity, sediment and productivity within the Tigres Island-Bay complex about 50 km north of the river mouth. This link, underpinning elevated local productivity, is a regionally unique feature. However, the original EBSA delineation also included but overlooked the presence of shelf-incising canyons and seamounts in EBSA footprint, which also contribute to elevated productivity are foraging habitat. New information since the initial description has facilitated a northward extension of the EBSA to include adjacent canyons and seamounts, as well as the full extent of the coastline of Iona National Park. In short, Namibe comprises a highly diverse collection of species and habitats in very close proximity, many of which are also threatened, with unique and other features that promote high productivity. In turn this drives importance of the area for supporting the life-histories of key species, such as providing foraging, breeding and resting habitats for seals, fish, turtles, and migratory and resident birds.

Introduction of the area

Adjacent to the arid, mostly uninhabited, and remote 100 km of the southern Angolan coastline is an area of limited geographic but notable ecological prominence. Tigres Island and adjacent bay are a remnant of the pre-1970s peninsula formed by sediment discharged from the Kunene River. These features form a rare coastal wetland that plays an important role in the life cycles of many marine and terrestrial fauna (Simmons et al., 2006, Paterson 2007). The predominantly sandy island, measuring ~6 km at its widest point and ~22 km in length, has withstood the weathering effects of the Atlantic since the breaching of the isthmus in 1973, and has become an important site for a number of migratory and resident aquatic fauna (Morant 1996b, Simmons et al., 2006, Dyer 2007, Meÿer 2007). Approximately 50 km south of Tigres Island is an ecologically significant natural marine-freshwater feature: the Kunene River mouth. Although discharge volumes are erratic, this sub-tropical, perennial river may discharge up to 30 million m³ of fresh water per day into the sea. This has pronounced physicochemical influences on the adjacent marine habitat (sublittoral to littoral coastal region) to an extent of ~100 km from the river mouth, mostly northwards, but also southwards during certain times of the year and during abnormal climatic events, such as Benguela Niños (Simmons et al., 1993, Shillington 2003). A lagoon extends 2 km south from the river mouth (Simmons et al., 1993). These features provide foraging, roosting and breeding habitat for a range of fauna, including sea- and shorebirds (Braine 1990, Simmons et al., 1993, Anderson et al., 2001, Dyer 2007, Simmons 2010), marine and freshwater reptiles (Griffin & Channing 1991, Simmons et al., 1993, Griffin 1994, Carter & Bickerton 1996, Griffin 2002), crustaceans (Carter & Bickerton 1996), marine and freshwater fish species (Simmons et al., 1993, Hay et al., 1997, Fishpool & Evans 2001, Holtzhausen 2003), as well as resident (Meÿer 2007) and transient marine mammals (Paterson 2007). In this region the presence of the Cape Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) is verified. This species is strongly associated with the cooler waters of the Benguela Current ecosystem and, therefore, its distribution extends to the western coast of southern Africa to the south of Angola. *A. pusillus* are most common in southern Angola, where there is a large colony in Tigres Bay (Morais et al., 2006). Weir (2013) found that this was the most common marine mammal species in the

Benguela region but rarely seen in the northern-most regions. This confirms the link between the northern Angolan section of the EBSA and the Namibian sections.

The revised boundary for this EBSA now includes the full extent of the coastline of the adjacent Iona National Park, which is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area that similarly supports migratory and resident birds in this area. Further, since the original description, a regional map of marine ecosystems has become available for Namibia and Angola (Holness et al., 2014). It was then noted that the original Kunene-Tigres EBSA contained seamounts and canyons that were also likely contributing to the elevated productivity that underpins the key foraging areas for the species noted above. Therefore, the EBSA was extended northward to include adjacent seamounts and canyons that were in close proximity to Tigres Island and adjacent to the Iona National Park IBA. The southern boundary was also refined to improve precision based on the new habitat map. The habitats that are influenced by the Kunene River, i.e., those formed from terrigenous sediments flowing out of the river, are now included in their full extent. Furthermore, the real extent of the Kunene Estuary, on which this whole EBSA depends, is now included to improve precision over the much smaller representation of the estuary in the original boundary. Namibe is thus proposed as a Type 2 EBSA (*sensu* Johnson et al. 2018) because it comprises a collection of features and ecosystems that are connected by the same ecological processes.

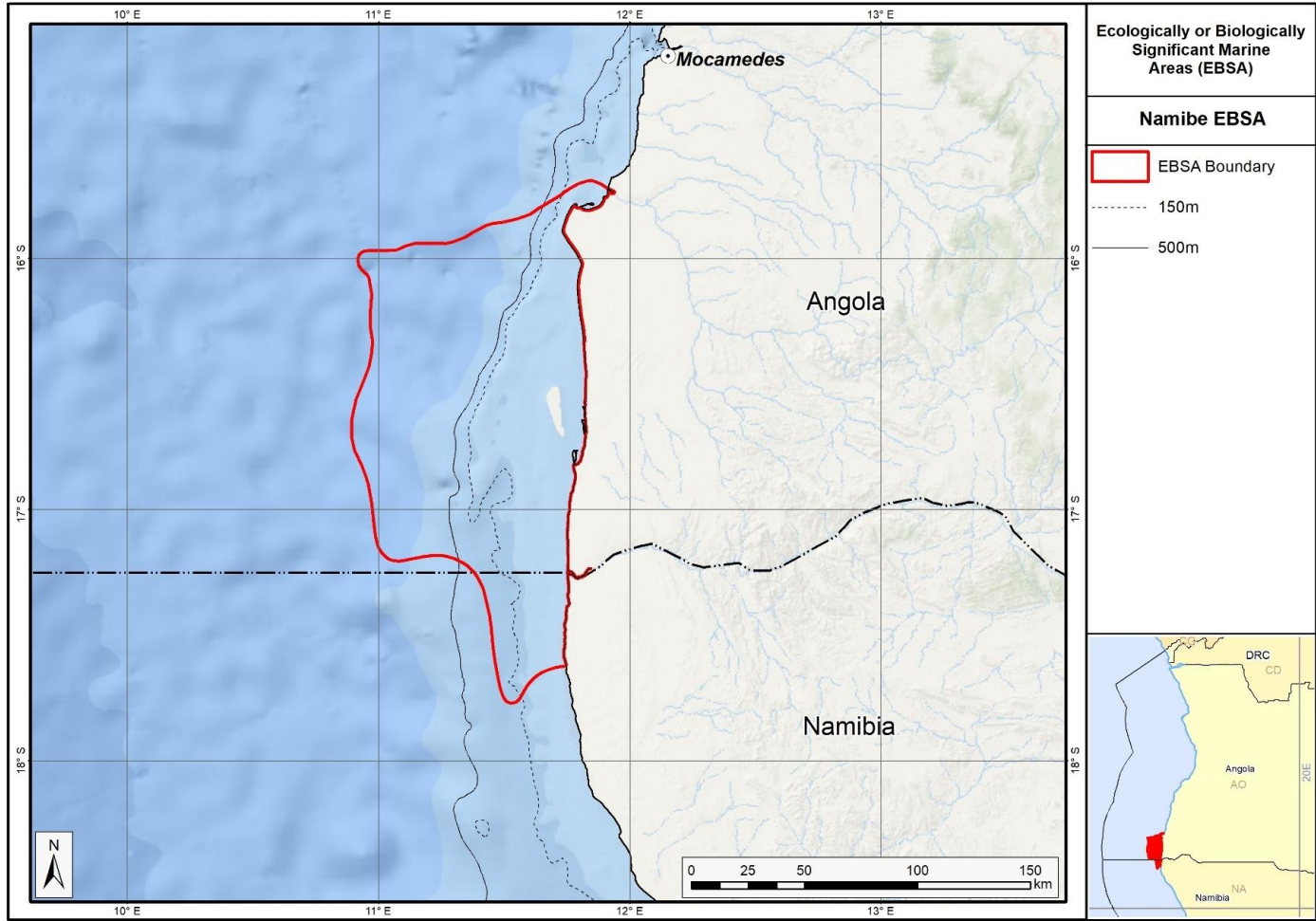
Description of the location

EBSA Region

South-Eastern Atlantic

Description of location

The delineated area extends along the shore approximately 170 km north of the Kunene mouth into southern Angola (to the northern boundary of Iona National Park at Curoca River), and 40 km south of the Kunene mouth into northern Namibia. The maximum offshore extent is approximately 100 km, although the Namibian section extends only 40 km offshore. The EBSA includes the Tigres Bay lagoon and approximately 12 km of the Kunene estuary. Namibe is well within the national jurisdictions of the two neighbouring countries it straddles (i.e., Angola and Namibia), with >80 % of the area falling within Angolan jurisdiction. In Namibia, this EBSA borders the Skeleton Coast National Park; and in Angola it borders the Iona National Park. It has a total area of approximately 15,000km².



Revised boundary of the Namibe EBSA.

Feature description of the area

Namibe comprises a rich diversity of features, species and habitats. The southern portion includes the Kunene estuary and surrounding river-influenced ecosystems, with the bulk of the influence from the river (freshwater, sediment and nutrients) transported north, connecting to Tigres Island and Tigres Bay in Angola. The surrounding ecosystems also include canyons and seamounts that contribute to the productivity and diversity in the EBSA. Tigres Bay is approximately 11 km at its widest point (northern region of Tigres Bay) and ~8.5 km at its narrowest point (southern limit of Tigres Island from the mainland), with a longitudinal extent of ~60 km.

Surveys of the area have recorded 26 bird species with abundances of around 13000 individuals (Simmons et al., 1993, Simmons et al., 2006, Simmons 2010). Several bird species breed on Tigres Island or along the bay (including globally threatened Cape Cormorants and Damara Terns, and locally threatened Great White Pelicans and Caspian Terns; Simmons et al., 2006; Dyer 2007; Simmons 2010) and Cape fur seals breed on the island (Meÿer 2007). The Kunene River mouth and adjacent marine habitat supports a lower bird density (~4000 individuals) than does Tigres Bay, but a higher species richness, and serves as a refuelling and resting area for Palearctic migrant bird species (Simmons et al., 1993). At least 119 bird species have been recorded at the Kunene River mouth (Paterson 2007), and there are records of 381 species in the EBSA area, of which 2 are Critically Endangered, 3 are Endangered, and 9 are Vulnerable (OBIS, 2017). Iona National Park in Angola is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. Furthermore, the Kunene-Namib area is known to support the largest density of green turtles in Namibia (Griffin & Channing 1991; Simmons et al., 2006), with olive ridleys also present. In addition, there are many species of fish, sharks and cetaceans in the area, some of which are threatened, that breed and/or forage in this EBSA (Hay et al., 1997, Holtzhausen 2003, Paterson 2007).

Habitat heterogeneity is high, with 15 habitats present in the EBSA. These include representation of two threatened habitat types: the Endangered Kunene Outer Shelf, and Vulnerable Kunene Shelf Edge. These threat statuses were determined by assessing the weighted cumulative impacts of various pressures (e.g., extractive resource use, pollution, development and others) on each habitat type for Namibia and Angola (Table in the Other relevant website address or attached documents section; Holness et al., 2014).

Feature conditions and future outlook of the proposed area

Due to the remoteness of the Namibe focus area, limited human impacts (apart from current mining/exploration) on the marine and coastal areas have resulted in this area being relatively pristine. However, threats to the pristine nature of this ecologically important area include industrial interests upstream of the Kunene River mouth (including proposals to dam the river for power generation) and recent increases in fishing, mining and tourism interests on both sides of the Kunene River mouth (Simmons et al., 1993, Paterson 2007). The Namibian portions of the area are generally in good condition, although most of the Angolan area is in fair condition, primarily due to the high intensity of artisanal and commercial fishing taking place there (Holness et al., 2014). Consequently, 63 % of the overall area has been identified as being in fair condition, and 25 % in good condition.

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Assessment of the area against CBD EBSA criteria

C1: Uniqueness or rarity **High**

Justification

The Namibe area is unique in the sense that it is the only sheltered, predominantly marine, sandy bay with a link to a perennial river for a 1500 km stretch along the Namibian coast and a 200 km stretch along the Angolan coast (Simmons et al., 2006). Being both geographically and biologically isolated, this area is ranked amongst the most threatened in Namibia (Simmons et al. 1993, Carter and Bickerton 1996, Barnard and Curtis 1998, Bethune 1998, De Moor et al., 2000) and supports reptilian fauna unique to Southern Africa (Kolberg & Simmons 1998). Furthermore, the Kunene wetland is globally unique as it is the only freshwater input area that is located adjacent to an upwelling cell, viz. the Kunene upwelling cell, and wedged within the longitudinal range of a warm-cold water frontal system, i.e., the Angola-Benguela frontal system (Lutjeharms & Meeuwis 1987, Paterson 2007).

C2: Special importance for life-history stages of species **High**

Justification

The Namibe wetlands serve as resting grounds for Palearctic migratory birds that use the area to build up energy reserves during their seasonal migrations (Simmons et al., 1993). The area (particularly Tigres Island) also serves as the breeding site for several bird species (Simmons et al., 2006, Simmons 2010). In addition to a colony of Cape fur seals, a number of other marine mammals (in particular Heaviside's dolphins, long-finned pilot whales, bottlenose dolphins, beaked whales and Atlantic humpback dolphins) have also been recorded in the general area (Dyer 2007, Paterson 2007). However, little research has been done on cetaceans there, and they are currently considered to be only transient visitors to the area (Paterson 2007). Namibe is very important for green turtles, with high densities of these animals known to occur in the area, which also represents the southernmost distribution of the species along the African west coast (Carr & Carr 1991, Griffin and Channing 1991, Carter & Bickerton 1996, Branch 1998, Griffin 2002, Fretey 2001, Paterson 2007). Furthermore, Namibe is an important spawning area for many marine fish species found along the northern and central Namibian coast (Hay et al., 1997, Holtzhausen 2003).

C3: Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats Medium

Justification

The EBSA contains portions of two threatened habitats, assessed by determining the weighted cumulative impacts of various pressures (e.g., extractive resource use, pollution, development and others) on each habitat type for Namibia and Angola (Table in the Other relevant website address or attached documents section; Holness et al., 2014): the Endangered Kunene Outer Shelf, and Vulnerable Kunene Shelf Edge. Further, the Kunene-Tigres area (including the island, the bay, the river mouth and adjacent marine environment) supports threatened and/or regionally endemic bird species – in particular the Great White Pelican: *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Cape Cormorant: *Phalacrocorax capensis*, Lesser Flamingo: *Phoeniconaias minor*, African Black Oystercatcher: *Haematopus moquini*, Hartlaub's Gull: *Chroicocephalus hartlaubii*, Caspian Tern: *Hydroprogne caspia* and Damara Tern: *Sternula balaenarum* (Barnard & Curtis 1998, Anderson et al., 2001, Simmons et al., 2006, Simmons et al., 2015). Cetaceans that are endemic to the region (e.g., Heaviside's dolphin: *Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*), or are threatened (e.g., the Vulnerable sperm whale, *Physeter microcephalus*; OBIS 2017) also make use of this area during their life cycles (Paterson 2007). Other threatened species in the area include the fish and condricthian species: *Squatina oculata* and *Squatina aculeate* (Critically Endangered); *Argyrosomus hololepidotus*, *Rostroraja alba*, and *Sphyrna lewini* (Endangered); and *Thunnus obesus*, *Mustelus mustelus*, *Rhinobatos albomaculatus*, *Oxynotus centrina*, *Oreochromis macrochir*, and *Centrophorus squamosus* (Vulnerable; OBIS, 2017). The resident edible freshwater prawn: *Macrobrachium vollenhovenii* is also believed to be geographically, ecophysiologicaly and morphologically distinct here due to the physical characteristics of the Kunene River mouth (Carter and Bickerton 1996, Patterson 2007). Large aggregations of green turtles, *Chelonia mydas*, found in the area further support the significance of the area in relation to this EBSA criterion; Vulnerable olive ridley turtles, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, are also present. This criterion is ranked as medium because the cetaceans listed are probably non-resident here, and there are other areas along the Namibian coast that are considered more important in terms of supporting threatened and endemic bird species.

Kommentar [LRH1]: Upgrade to high?

C4: Vulnerability, fragility, sensitivity, or slow recovery Medium

Justification

The EBSA is largely underpinned by the influence of the Kunene River. Consequently, there is a moderate level of vulnerability and sensitivity to disturbance because changes to the freshwater outflow could result in significant changes to the ecosystems it influences by altering sediment

delivery, salinity and nutrient concentrations. The vulnerability of the site to changes in productivity is, in part, buffered by the numerous other features that also contribute to productivity in the area, including the upwelling cell and the seamounts and canyons. The Kunene wetlands are believed to be vulnerable to environmental change mainly as a result of anthropogenic stress from activities such as fishing, mining and industrial development (Schneider & Miller 1992; Simmons et al., 1993; De Moor et al., 2000; Paterson 2007). The species at the site include turtles, cetaceans, sharks, seals and birds that are sensitive to declines in population abundance, and would be slow to recover from impacts.

Historically, dams constructed along the upper reaches of the Kunene River (six in total) have not had significant negative impacts on the flow characteristics of the river and naturalness of the adjacent wetland (Paterson 2007). This may be linked to the fact that the six dams have never been in operation at the same time due to structural damages sustained during the historic civil unrest in the region. This, however, may change as there is a proposal for a new hydroelectric dam to be built in the vicinity of the Epupa Falls (Dentlinger 2005), and potential still exists for the renovation of the existing six dams (Paterson 2007). Limited fishing occurs in the area that poses threats to vulnerable species such as green turtles (which are often targeted by small military contingents near the Kunene River mouth) and marine mammals, which can get entangled in gillnets used by the fishers on the Angolan side of the border (Paterson 2007). On the Namibian side, diamond mining poses a threat to the area; prospecting taking place some 10 km south of the Kunene River mouth (Schneider & Miller 1992; Paterson 2007). There has also been a proposal for a deepwater harbour at one of two locations (viz. Cape Fria or Angra Fria), which are located roughly 160 and 130 km south of the Kunene River mouth, respectively (Paterson 2007). There have also been calls for the investigation of aquaculture viability at the Kunene River mouth, focusing on the edible freshwater prawn that is resident to the area (Paterson 2007). Furthermore, limited tourism interests are already established on the Namibian side and with tourism gaining momentum on the Angolan side, this industry could also pose a threat to the naturalness of the area if not properly regulated (Simmons et al., 2006, Paterson 2007).

C5: Biological productivity High

Justification

The Namibe area is considered to be productive due to its unique geographical location. It is situated within the moderately strong Kunene Upwelling Cell, within the longitudinal range of the Angola-Benguela frontal system (Lutjeharms & Meeuwis 1987, Paterson 2007), and at the mouth of one of only two perennial rivers in Namibia. The nutrients carried by the Benguela Current are supplemented by nutrient inputs from the Kunene River, providing a rich food supply that supports a diverse fish community in the area (Paterson 2007). In addition, the EBSA contains ecosystems that are characteristically associated with relatively higher productivity, including wetlands, seamounts and canyons. Jointly, this collection of productive features results in a site of high productivity that in turn provides foraging areas for several species, including seals, birds and turtles that breed or rest in the coastal areas (e.g., Simmons et al., 2006; Dyer 2007; Simmons 2010), as well as supporting many fish species that spawn in the area (Paterson 2007).

C6: Biological diversity High

Justification

Habitat heterogeneity in Namibe is high, with 15 distinct habitat types present in the EBSA (Holness et al., 2014). The Namibe wetlands also support a high diversity of species, including terrestrial, freshwater and marine fauna (Paterson 2007). Over and above freshwater and marine reptiles (e.g.,

Nile soft-shelled terrapin, Nile crocodile, green turtle and Nile monitor), and cetaceans, the area also supports a large colony of Cape fur seals (Griffin & Channing 1991, Simmons et al., 1993, Carter & Bickerton 1996, Patterson 2007). The Kunene river mouth is also one of Namibia's most diverse bird areas, with a total of at least 119 bird species (including 8 resident waders, 22 palearctic waders, 32 wetland-, 19 marine- and 38 non-wetland bird species; Ryan et al., 1984, Braine 1990, Simmons et al., 1993, Anderson et al., 2001, Paterson 2007). In terms of ichthyofauna, 65 freshwater fish species (five of which are endemic to the area) and 19 marine fish species have been recorded in Namibe (Hay et al., 1997, Holtzhausen 2003, Paterson 2007).

C7: Naturalness Medium

Justification

In Namibia, human impacts on the Namibe area have been limited due to its remoteness. However, historic and current fishing activities, combined with dam construction, mining and prospecting activities in and around the area have had some impacts on the local naturalness (Simmons et al., 1993, De Moor et al., 2000, Paterson 2007). Much of the Angolan area was identified as being in fair condition by Holness et al. (2014) largely due to the high intensity of artisanal and commercial fishing. Consequently, overall 63 % of the area is in fair condition and 25 % in good condition.

Other relevant website address or attached documents

Summary of habitat types and threat status for Namibe. Data from Holness et al. (2014).

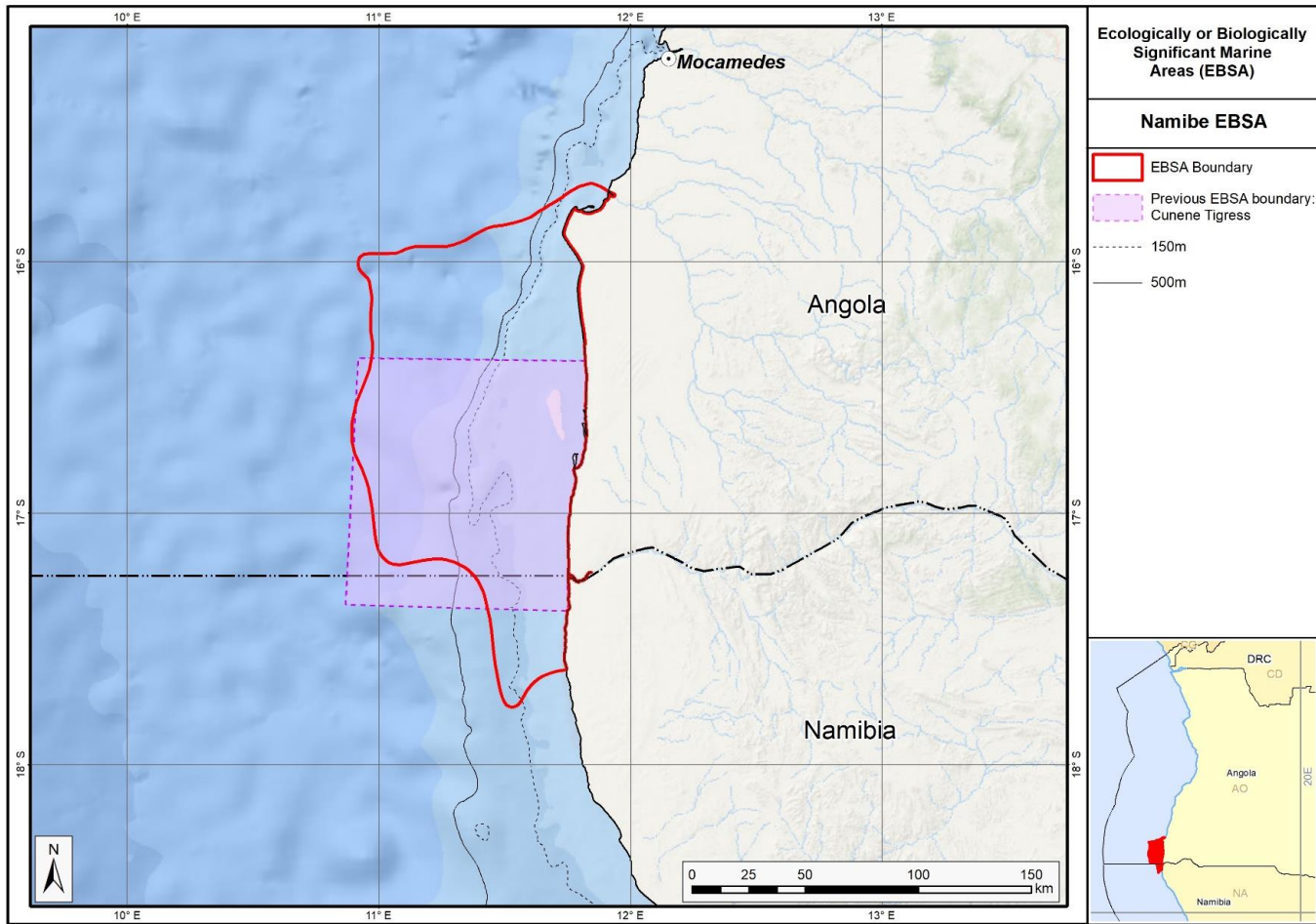
Threat Status	Ecosystem Type	Area km ²	Area (%)
Endangered	Cunene Outer Shelf	919.6	6%
Endangered Total		919.6	6%
Vulnerable	Cunene Shelf Edge	601.9	4%
	Tombua Estuarine Shore	3.8	0%
	Tombua Inshore	56.6	0%
	Tombua Mixed Shore	0.5	0%
	Tombua Reflective Sandy Beach	22.1	0%
	Tombua Sheltered Rocky Shore	2.4	0%
Vulnerable Total		687.2	5%
Least Threatened	Cunene Dissipative-Intermediate Sandy Beach	11.6	0%
	Cunene Estuarine Shore	6.2	0%
	Cunene Inner Shelf	2,220.9	15%
	Cunene Inshore	655.8	4%
	Cunene Intermediate Sandy Beach	56.6	0%
	Cunene Island	860.6	6%
	Cunene Lagoon Coast	5.1	0%
	Cunene Low-energy Reflective Sandy Beach	14.3	0%
	Cunene Lower Slope	3,720.9	25%
	Cunene Mixed Shore	28.5	0%
	Cunene Reflective Sandy Beach	57.6	0%
	Cunene Shelf	2,443.9	16%
	Cunene Upper Slope	3,112.2	21%
	Namibe Shelf	148.4	1%
	Namibe Shelf Edge	61.4	0%
	Namibe Upper Slope	25.9	0%
	Tombua Intermediate Sandy Beach	5.7	0%
Tombua Low-energy Reflective Sandy Beach	12.8	0%	
Least Threatened Total		13,448.6	89%
Grand Total		15,055.4	100%

Status of submission

The Kunene – Tigres EBSA was recognized as an area meeting EBSA criteria that were considered by the Conference of the Parties. The revised name, description and boundaries still needs to be submitted to COP for approval.

COP Decision

dec-COP-12-DEC-22



The revised Namibe EBSA in relation to the original Kunene-Tigres EBSA