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Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas



A **Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)** is an area that needs special protection through action by IMO because of its significance for recognized ecological or socio-economic or scientific reasons and which may be vulnerable to damage by international maritime activities. The criteria for the identification of particularly sensitive sea areas and the criteria for the designation of special areas are not mutually exclusive. In many cases a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area may be identified within a Special Area and vice versa.

Particularly sensitive sea areas

Guidelines on designating a "particularly sensitive sea area" (PSSA) are contained in resolution [A.982\(24\) Revised guidelines for the identification and designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas \(PSSAs\)](#). These guidelines include criteria to allow areas to be

designated a PSSA if they fulfil a number of criteria, including: ecological criteria, such as unique or rare ecosystem, diversity of the ecosystem or vulnerability to degradation by natural events or human activities; social, cultural and economic criteria, such as significance of the area for recreation or tourism; and scientific and educational criteria, such as biological research or historical value.

The provisions of the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#) are also relevant.

When an area is approved as a particularly sensitive sea area, specific measures can be used to control the maritime activities in that area, such as routing measures, strict application of MARPOL discharge and equipment requirements for ships, such as oil tankers; and installation of Vessel Traffic Services (VTS).

List of adopted PSSAs

The following PSSAs have been designated:

- [The Great Barrier Reef](#), Australia (designated a PSSA in 1990)
- [The Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago](#) in Cuba (1997)
- [Malpelo Island](#), Colombia (2002)
- [The sea around the Florida Keys](#), United States (2002)
- [The Wadden Sea](#), Denmark, Germany, Netherlands (2002)
- [Paracas National Reserve](#), Peru (2003)
- [Western European Waters](#) (2004)
- [Extension of the existing Great Barrier Reef PSSA to include the Torres Strait](#) (proposed by Australia and Papua New Guinea) (2005)
- [Canary Islands](#), Spain (2005)
- [The Galapagos Archipelago](#), Ecuador (2005)
- [The Baltic Sea area](#), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden (2005)
- [The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument](#), United States (2007)
- [The Strait of Bonifacio](#), France and Italy (2011)
- [The Saba Bank](#), in the North-eastern Caribbean area of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (2012)
- [Extension of Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait to encompass the south-west part of the Coral Sea](#) (2015)

Explore each PSSA at www.pssa.imo.org.

A.982(24) Revised guidelines for the identification and designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs)

The IMO Assembly in November-December 2005 at its 24th session adopted revised Guidelines for the Identification and Designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) ([resolution A.982\(24\)](#)).

A PSSA is an area that needs special protection through action by IMO because of its significance for recognized ecological, socio-economic, or scientific attributes where such attributes may be vulnerable to damage by international shipping activities. An application for PSSA designation should contain a proposal for an associated protective measure or measures aimed at preventing, reducing or eliminating the threat or identified vulnerability. Associated protective measures for PSSAs are limited to actions that are to be, or have been, approved and adopted by IMO, for example, a routing system such as an area to be avoided.

The guidelines provide advice to IMO Member Governments in the formulation and submission of applications for the designation of PSSAs to ensure that in the process, all interests - those of the coastal State, flag State, and the environmental and shipping communities - are thoroughly considered on the basis of relevant scientific, technical, economic, and environmental information regarding the area at risk of damage from international shipping activities.

The guidelines update resolution [A.927\(22\) Guidelines for the Designation of Special Areas under MARPOL 73/78 and Guidelines for the Identification and Designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas](#).

Ships routing measures to protect PSSAs

A PSSA can be protected by ships routing measures – such as an area to be avoided: an area within defined limits in which either navigation is particularly hazardous or it is exceptionally important to avoid casualties and which should be avoided by all ships, or by certain classes of ships.

The IMO Publication [Ships' Routing](#) includes General provisions on ships' routing, first adopted by IMO in 1973, and subsequently amended over the years, which are aimed at standardizing the design, development, charted presentation and use of routing measures adopted by IMO.

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Related Links

[PSSA interactive website](#)

[Video about PSSAs](#)