SIOFA | APSOI
Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement
Accord relatif aux Pêches dans le Sud de l'Océan Indien

Virtual SIOFA SC Workshop on Window of Opportunity – Research vessels in SIOFA (WS2025-ORS)

Virtual, 4 November 2025

WS2025-ORS-01

Summary of the SIOFA Scientific Committee and Meeting of Parties reports on research needs

The Workshop Conveners

Document type	workshop paper ✔
Distribution	Public ✔ Restricted [1] ☐ Closed session document [2] ☐

Abstract

The 10th annual meeting of the SIOFA Scientific Commmittee agreed to hold a half-day virtual workshop aimed at identifying research opportunities in support of SIOFA scientific activities when research vessels are planning research cruises in the SIOFA area. Such workshop was included in the Scientific Committee (SC) Workplan (MoP12-08-Rev1) that was adopted by the Meeting of Parties (MoP) (MoP12 Report, paragraph 194).

This document provides a summary of the discussions and recommendations on research by the SC and MoP.
To create this summary, the SC and MoP reports since 2013 were searched for references (excluding Annexes in the case of MoP reports) to "knowledge gaps", "research cruises/vessels", "research fishing", "research gaps", "research needs", "research plan", "scientific research" and "scientific needs".

The SC recommendations are highlighted in grey, as in the original reports.

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1. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Meeting of Parties for 2013-2015

1.1. MoP1 report (2013) noted the following

Nothing in MoP1 body report. However, Appendix 6 "Opening Statement by SIODFA" contains references to research.

1.2. MoP2 report (2015) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 7.1 – Provision of Secretariat Services – consideration of proposals

Para 33. The European Union delegation proposed that the Réunion Island would be an ideal location for the headquarters of an international fisheries management organization on account of the benefits to be derived from the local innovation, research and regional cooperation infrastructures in addition to the island's excellent logistics in terms of hosting major regional events. The EU underlined the availability of immediate space facility of around 200 m2 in close vicinity that meet the organisation's needs, and routine maintenance, all free of charge, within the DAAF buildings, at Providence Park in Saint-Denis de La Réunion. The proposal of the European Union is at Appendix S.

(End of Agenda Item 7)

2. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of Parties for 2016

2.1. The SC1 report (2016) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 2 – Administrative arrangements

Para 3. The Scientific Committee adopted the agenda as presented in Annex C and agreed to discuss the items on the Scientific Committee Work Plan, long term research priorities plan and the 2016-18 work plan and budget as a group.

(End of Agenda Item 2)

Under Agenda Item 4 – Development of SIOFA Scientific Committee long term Research Priorities Plan

Para 14. The Scientific Committee developed a Research Priorities Plan. This plan is aligned with the Work Plan and provides more detail on its research activities. The timeframe of this plan was agreed to be three to five years with review at least every two years by the Scientific Committee.

Para 15. The Scientific Committee adopted the Research Priorities Plan at Annex G and it is provided for information to the MoP.

(End of Agenda Item 4)

Under Agenda Item 5 - Review of fisheries: summary of fishing activity

Para 19. The Cook Islands has historically had up to five flagged vessels operating in the SIOFA Area, with two longstanding fishing vessels operating since 2001. These vessels target orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*) and alfonsino (*Beryx spp.*) using bottom and mid-water trawl fishing methods. The data provided in the Cook Islands national report was compiled using logbook data and must be considered provisional as some data are not yet available. All vessel catch is unloaded in Mauritius and South Africa, and as such, no port sampling program by Cook Islands exists to monitor these unloads due to their location however landings are reported to and monitored by the port state fisheries agencies. There has been a range of comprehensive research programs undertaken by Cook Island vessels including development of guidelines around biological sampling and acoustic surveys. Some of these programs are described in SC-01-INFO-16, SC-01-INFO-17 and SC-01 -INFO-19, some of which will be presented under agenda item 7 on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems. The Cook Islands also

has an observer program with targeted observer coverage undertaken in recent years. Observer data are collected as a data verification tool for the vessel scientific data collection.

(End of Agenda Item 5)

Under Agenda Item 7 – Vulnerable marine ecosystems

Para 44. **The Scientific Committee noted** that several of the project's areas may have direct benefits to SIOFA. Potential links were identified in the Scientific Committee's Research Priorities Plan and 2016-2018 Operational Work Plan.

Para 51. The Scientific Committee discussed the role of habitat suitability models in identifying areas of potential VMEs, noting research undertaken in other areas, including SIOFA and SEAFO. The Scientific Committee discussed the level of evidence required to inform the management of risks and need to identify areas of uncertainty. SIODFA expressed that some habitat suitability models were not robust predictors of the presence or absence of coral or sponges.

(End of Agenda Item 7)

Under Agenda Item 8 – Stock assessment for deep sea fisheries

Para 82. There was discussion on the role of industry vessels as platforms for collecting data to inform stock assessments. There was general agreement that this was likely to be a cost effective approach, given the scale of the fisheries and the geographic distances involved. SIODFA suggested that commercial vessels engaged in the fishery should be required/expected to undertake these types of research and data collection as a condition for access to the fishery, the use of independent research vessels is cost prohibitive, and acoustic assessments should therefore be conducted by commercial vessels under guidance from the Scientific Committee. The CCAMLR requirements for commercial vessels in exploratory fisheries to participate in research activities was noted.

Para 91. The SC discussed the biological data needed for stock assessment, and noted key gaps especially knowledge of stock structure and age composition. The SC noted that standard protocols for orange roughy should be used and the Cook Islands circulated a paper that described a protocol (Age determination protocol for orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*). (Horn, P.L.; Tracey, D.M.; Doonan, I.J.; Krusic-Golub, K. (2016), New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2016/03). In terms of orange roughy stock structure, the Cook Islands drew attention to the information on in paper SC-01-INFO-16, and highlighted the recommendation from SC-02-08 (01) that to enable the estimation of the precision of biomass estimates at least three acoustic surveys of a stock within a year are required.

Para 94. The Cook Islands noted the research work completed aboard Cook Islands flagged vessels included the collection of deepwater shark data over the past 10 years and that this had contributed to the FAO projects on shark identification.

(End of Agenda Item 8)

Under Agenda Item 11 – Scientific Committee Research Priorities Plan

Para 106. The Scientific Committee adopted the Research Priorities Plan at Annex G and it is provided for information to the MoP.

(End of Agenda Item 11)

2.2. MoP3 report (2016) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 5 – Report of the first Session of the Scientific Committee

Para 15. Consistent with paragraph 16 of the Scientific Committee Terms of Reference, the Meeting of the Parties adopted the Scientific Committee's work plan as amended (Annex G refers). The

Meeting of the Parties noted the research priorities (Annex H refers) plan and the operational work plan for 2016-2018 as included in the Scientific Committee's meeting report.

(End of Agenda Item 5)

3. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2017

3.1. The SC2 report (2017) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 4 – Annual National Reports

Para 22. Japan presented a document that describes following seven items requested by the National Report Template, i.e., "Fisheries", "Catch, effort and CPUE", "Fisheries data collection and research activities", "VME Thresholds", "Biological sampling and length/age composition of catches", "Data verification mechanisms" and "Observer program". In the SIOFA convention area, Japan has been operating two different types of fisheries discontinuously for 40 years (1977-2016), i.e., trawl fisheries targeting splendid alfonsino and bottom longline fisheries targeting Patagonian toothfish. Based on accumulated information, the seven items are described within the report for both trawl and bottom longline fisheries.

(End of Agenda Item 4)

Under Agenda Item – 5 Scientific Data Standards

Para 47. The SC discussed that the approach applied to verify electronic monitoring could also apply to 'self-sampling' programs (where fishers collect scientific samples or data).

(End of Agenda Item 5)

Under Agenda Item – 5.3 SIOFA Scientific database

Para 52. The SC noted that the progress on the database was very encouraging. The SC requested that the Secretariat finalise the database as soon as possible, noting that the data were critical to the SC's ability to generate data summaries, data input for stock assessment, mapping, ERA and bycatch research. The SC requested Parties to submit tow-by-tow observer and catch and effort data in line with CCM 2016/02, to the Secretariat for input into the SIOFA databases.

(End of Agenda Item 9.1)

Under Agenda Item 8.2 – Alfonsino

Para 96. The SC discussed the need to review and understand the data and summaries provided, including:

- how representative the data are, e.g. sampling protocols, spatial and temporal coverage and by fleet.

(End of Agenda Item 8.2)

Under Agenda Item 13 – Advice to the Meeting of the Parties

Para 128. The SC noted that the progress on the database was very encouraging. The SC requested that the Secretariat finalise the database as soon as possible, noting that the data were critical to the SC's ability to generate data summaries, data input for stock assessment, mapping, ERA and bycatch research. The SC requested Parties to submit tow-by-tow observer and catch and effort data in line with CCM 2016/02, to the Secretariat for input into the SIOFA databases. (Paragraph 52)

(End of Agenda Item 13)

3.2. MoP4 report (2017) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 12 – New Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs)

Para 36. The EU presented the final two proposals outstanding from the Compliance Committee, for research vessels and at sea inspection scheme (CC-01-08 (05) Rev1 and CC-01-08 (02) Rev1). Discussion opened, and given the limited time, and lack of consensus with some aspects, no further progress was made. The EU agreed to withdraw and defer the proposals to the next Meeting of the Parties and lead intersessional consultations with the parties, to develop the proposals further for the next Meeting of the Parties meeting.

Para 39. In regard to the proposal for a CMM on fishing research, it was agreed that the draft CMM should be forwarded to the Scientific Committee for consideration with a request for guidance as detailed in paragraph 41. Some parties expressed their concern about the submission of research data to the Secretariat from the view point of intellectual property rights and data confidentiality. Australia expressed strong concern with exempting research vessels from all CMMs and noted the importance of finding a balance between meeting research objectives without undermining CMMs.

Para 40. The Meeting of the Parties requested that the Scientific Committee provides advice and recommendations in relation to the development of the EU's proposal for a CMM to regulate fisheries research in the Agreement Area that was briefly discussed at the 2017 Meeting of the Parties. The objective is to ensure that an appropriate system to regulate yet encourage fisheries research is adopted in accordance with Article 6 of the Agreement which specifies that parties shall 'develop rules for the collection of scientific data' and 'promote and coordinate research activities'.

Para 41. In particular, advice and recommendations should consider:

a. the definition of 'fisheries research' and 'research activities carried out by commercial fishing vessels' which should and can be considered under such a SIOFA management system;

b. the type and extent of data which are collected from the Agreement Area during fisheries research activities, which should reasonably be required for submission to SIOFA, to ensure that the needs of the Scientific Committee are met, whilst the principles and regulations concerning data ownership and confidentiality are respected;

c. the particular provisions within existing CMMs from which it is reasonable for research vessels to be exempted;

d. the recommendations contained in the FAO deep sea guidelines for conducting high seas fisheries research for deep sea fisheries; and

e. the appropriate consultation and approval processes to be adopted within SIOFA, in particular the role of the Scientific Committee.

(End of Agenda Item 12)

4. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2018

4.1. The SC3 report (2018) noted the following

Under Agenda item 4.1 Submission and consideration of historical catch and effort data

Para 46. Chinese vessels in SIOFA. The SC sought clarification on these orange roughy longline catches, as very few examples of longline catches of this species were known, despite extensive research trials to catch the fish by hook. China emphasized that the identification of orange roughy was mainly done by the crew, who may not have some professional skills and led to the misidentification of this species.

(End of Agenda Item 4.3)

Under Agenda item 5 – Scientific Data Standards

Para 66. The SC discussed sharing of SIOFA information relevant to scientific research with other RFMOs and the broader scientific community (e.g. the International Seabed Authority (ISA)) as potential collaborators. Collaboration was encouraged however for any collaboration sharing of data would need to be consistent with CMM 2016/03 on data confidentiality.

(End of Agenda Item 5)

Under Agenda item 5.2 – Observer coverage

Para 81. The SC discussed that different coverage levels, and combination of electronic monitoring/human observer coverage, should be considered in the context of the research (or compliance) needs. It was clarified that the intention of the use of electronic monitoring in Thai fisheries is to complement, rather than replace, human observers. Thailand noted that it is seeking advice on the proportion of coverage of electronic monitoring to human observers required to meet the observer coverage requirements.

Para 82. Australia noted that its experience with electronic monitoring for domestic fisheries was that fishing operation information such as positioning, haul times etc. could be collected using electronic monitoring with good accuracy. For Australia's non-trawl fisheries, electronic monitoring has been used primarily as a verification tool for vessel logbook data. Australian applications of electronic monitoring includes 100% camera coverage with the minimum of a random 10% of the footage audited by its fisheries regulator. Australia commented that this process has increased the accuracy of logbook reporting for non-retained species. In terms of trawl fisheries, there remain challenges and there will need to be further research to improve its application in monitoring trawl vessels in Australian domestic fisheries.

Para 90. In response to the requirement to review observer coverage levels (CMM 2017/01 paragraph 32) the SC:

- Noted that additional background information is required to consider the types and level of observer coverage in relation to specific research, scientific committee work and/or other needs. This includes consideration of the needs of the Compliance Committee, which are beyond the remit of the SC.

- Advises the Meeting of the Parties that the SC cannot currently review the appropriateness of the current observer coverage levels, as there is little observer coverage data being provided at this point in time and the question of the appropriateness of coverage levels is dependent on the specific scientific needs and uses for these data. The SC should be able to undertake this review if the data inventory and other steps described above are completed before SC4.

(End of Agenda Item 5.2)

Under Agenda item 12 – Advice to the Meeting of Parties

Para 289. In relation to paper SC-03-12(01), the SC recommends that a revised draft is provided to the SC for review and that in producing the next draft, the SC recommends that the revised draft:

- Consider that the exemption of research activities from CMMs may be a case by case issue. There may be some provisions of CMMs from which some research activities could be exempted, e.g. in some cases it may be appropriate to be outside the defined footprint. However, this is dependent on the type of research and needs further consideration.

(End of Agenda Item 12)

4.2. MoP5 report (2018) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 4 – Report of the Third Meeting of the Scientific Committee

Para 64. A small working group of Scientific Committee representatives provided additional information (Annex M) on the prioritization of recommended research activities to be considered in the budget consideration (Agenda item 10.2).

(End of Agenda Item 4)

5. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2019

5.1. The SC4 report (2019) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 2.2 – Confirmation of meeting documents

Para 14. The paper on scientific research and new/exploratory fisheries (SC-04-INFO-12) was accepted as an information paper.

(End of Agenda Item 2.2)

Under Agenda item 7.3 – Patagonian toothfish

Para 148. Dr Keith Reid (CCAMLR) introduced SC-04-INFO-08 and outlined CCAMLR's use of a comparative seabed-area approach and a mark-recapture method from toothfish tagging data to estimate the biomass of toothfish in data-limited areas. The approaches taken by CCAMLR aim to set catch limits for toothfish that allow sufficient data collection to generate fully integrated stock assessments but that do not place stocks at risk in the intervening period. The catch limit that is used is 4% of the most recent biomass estimate as this exploitation rate is considered unlikely to impede the recovery of stocks in areas that might have been exposed to unknown levels of historical fishing. Fishing in data-limited exploratory toothfish fisheries in CCAMLR has a specific geographic restriction to 'research blocks' and is required to follow a detailed research plan that is endorsed by the Scientific Committee and the Commission. A transparent process to estimate biomass using the two different approaches has been agreed, as has a procedure to determine the most appropriate biomass estimate to use in setting catch limits for future research fishing.

(End of Agenda Item 7.3)

Under Agenda item 12 – Review and development of Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs)

Para 198. The Chair reminded the SC that SC3 had considered and discussed the EU proposal on a draft CMM to regulate fisheries research in the SIOFA Area and the SC had recommended that a revised draft be provided taking into account the guidance and requests provided in paragraph 289 of the SC3 Report.

(End of Agenda Item 12)

5.2. MoP6 report (2019) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 12.3 – Framework for Scientific Research

Para 113. The European Union presented the proposal to establish a Framework for Scientific Research and Fisheries-based research in the SIOFA Area outlined in document MoP6-Prop07. The European Union noted that following productive discussions in the CC3 and in the margins of this meeting, the proposal needed further development with input from CCPs.

(End of Agenda Item 12.3)

6. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2020

6.1. The SC5 report (2020) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 7.6 – Deepwater chondrichthyans

Para 150. The SC noted that there is considerable uncertainty around the characteristics of SIOFA deepwater chondrichthyan fisheries and that resolving these uncertainties would greatly assist future scientific research and management of these fisheries, and requested that SIOFA CCPs catching deepwater chondrichthyans (whether defined as 'targeted' or 'bycatch') collaborate to provide a paper to SC6 on the characteristics of these fisheries.

(End of Agenda Item 7.6)

Under Agenda Item 11.1 – Draft CMM on fishing research and exploratory fisheries

Para 177. The discussion of the draft CMM on fishing research and exploratory fisheries started through an online forum, between 7 to 21 July 2020.

Para 178. The EU presented SC-05-24, which provides a draft CMM to establish a framework for scientific research.

180. The SC reviewed the proposal and recommended that a revised draft is provided to the SC for review, taking into account:

- Care should be taken to avoid creating unnecessary barriers to conducting research. In particular, paragraphs 6 and 7 seem overly restrictive. CCPs should have the flexibility to conduct both fishery dependent and fishery independent research or direct their observers to collect data different from the 'usual data collection' that aligns with their scientific management or strategic priorities. Being required to seek approval and report on all scientific research can pose a significant administrative burden on CCPs without a clear justification.

- Paragraph 14 seems to be specific to surveys and not research in general, while the objective of this proposed CMM is stated as being to 'govern the undertaking of fisheries-related scientific research in the SIOFA Area'.

183. The SC discussed the draft CMM and recommended that the following points be considered in revising the draft:

- A clear distinction should be made between new fisheries and exploratory fisheries. A possible definition of exploratory fishery could be one based on CCAMLR CM 21-01 (2016), incorporating stock information, e.g. 'information on distribution, abundance, demography, potential yield and stock identity from comprehensive research/surveys or exploratory fisheries has not been submitted to SIOFA.'

(End of Agenda Item 11.1)

6.2. MoP7 report (2020) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 5 – Report of the Scientific Committee

Para 52. The Meeting of the Parties reviewed the report and advice of the SC5. Following this review, the Meeting of the Parties: d. Concerning the recommendation outlined in paragraph 49: 2. Noted that Japan intends to provide comments and request for clarification of the intended use of the SIOFA bottom fishing footprint (para49) which forms the foundation of the discussion of the framework for scientific research (para181)

(End of Agenda Item 5)

7. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2021

7.1. The SC6 report (2021) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 4.1 – Spatial Extent of Historic Catch Data, Bottom Fishing Footprint

Para 26. Japan presented SC-06-13, which provided Japan's comments on the purposes of the SIOFA bottom fishing footprint and the framework for scientific research. Japan recommended that the primary purpose of the footprint is to identify the spatial extent of existing fishing grounds, and that the primary purpose of the framework for scientific research is to define the footprint (existing fishing grounds) and thereby identify new fishing grounds, so that research activities such as bottom fishing impact assessment (BFIA) for both existing and new fishing grounds (framework) duly take into account the different nature of VMEs distributed in them.

Para 27. To accomplish these purposes, Japan requested the SC to consider the following points. Regarding the framework for scientific research, the SC should:

i. adopt the definition of the SIOFA bottom fishing footprint to identify the spatial extent of existing fishing grounds, so that the new fishing grounds (outside of the existing fishing grounds) are clearly defined;

ii. consider that the framework is defined as these two areas (existing (up to 2015) and new fishing area), so that scientific research activities (fishing surveys, exploratory fishing, BFIA and other associated activities) as well as fisheries management can be implemented differently and meaningfully under this framework; and

iii. establish the criteria to categorise new fishing grounds as existing fishing grounds using the SEAFO criteria (SEAFO-CM30/15), as one of the abovementioned associated activities.

(End of Agenda Item 4.1)

Under Agenda Item – 7.1. Alfonsino

Para 99. SIODFA introduced SC-06-INFO-10 on the possible use of tags for research on alfonsino fisheries. SIODFA was of the view that tagging of alfonsino taken by commercial fishing would not be feasible as the fish will be dead or near dead at the time of tagging. Consideration should be given to using research vessels instead.

(End of Agenda Item 7.1)

Under Agenda Item 10 – Review and development of Conservation and Management Measures

147. The SC NOTED the MoP's request to continue the work to develop a draft CMM on fishing research and exploratory fisheries. Due to time constraints, no related papers were presented at the meeting and the SC AGREED to progress this work intersessionally.

(End of Agenda Item 10)

7.2. MoP8 report (2021) noted the following

Under Agenda item 8 – Interim bottom fishing measures

Para 138. Mauritius stated that it noted the findings of the information papers with concern and urged CCPs to refrain from any bottom trawling in this area, as a precautionary measure, until a full assessment of resources in the region is completed. Mauritius also informed the Meeting of the Parties that, in collaboration with the Seychelles and Monaco Explorations, it is planning a research survey of the Saya de Malha Bank.

(End of Agenda Item 8)

8. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2022

8.1. The SC7 report (2022) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 9.3 – Review of advice from the PAEWG

Para 190. With regard to the VME mapping consultancy (project PAE2020-02), the SC ENDORSED the following PAEWG recommendations:

- The data scarcity in the Indian Ocean calls for urgent research exploration in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

- The taxonomic level of observer data is too broad for biodiversity analysis, and it was not included for the modelled maps, although it would be useful to model effort data and validate habitat suitability for certain groups. It is recommended that SIOFA develop an image catalogue of encountered VME indicator taxa that may evolve into a resource that could be used as a formal in situ guide for observers to use for identification during trips. To validate the models' predictions further, research campaigns should be organised.

(End of Agenda Item 9.3)

Under Agenda Item 12.4 – Monaco Exploration

Para 233. The DSCC expressed its support for the research expedition covering Saya de Malha, which is a highly important and sensitive area, and believed that the research from the expedition would be highly relevant to SIOFA.

(End of Agenda Item 12.4)

8.2. MoP9 report (2022) noted the following

Under Agenda item 5.3 – Grants applications and other funding for SIOFA scientific work

Para 160. The Secretariat presented the results of the application for EU funding to support the SC's activities. Two grants to support scientific research and the organisation of the 8th meeting of the SC were recently awarded to SIOFA, and the corresponding contracts signed between the Secretariat and the European Union. The Meeting of the Parties thanked the EU for the support and funding.

(End of Agenda Item 5)

9. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2023

9.1. The SC8 report (2023) noted the following

Under Agenda item 7.2.2. – Review of progress against CMM 2022/12 (Sharks), including development of precautionary bycatch limits

Para 248. The SC noted the recommendation in paragraph 84 of the deepwater sharks workshop report that the SC conduct further research to better understand the habitats and behaviour of deepwater sharks in this area, such as nursery grounds, areas where females concentrate, hotspots, etc., towards informing measures such as the setting of spatial management measures and protection of large, especially pregnant females. The SC noted that the study proposed by SIODFA and the ongoing research by the European Union constitute such research. The SC discussed such research further when discussing its workplan under agenda item 11.5.

(End of Agenda Item 7.2.2)

Under Agenda item 8.1 – Report of the VME workshop (WS2022-VME1)

Para 277. The SC endorsed and elaborated on the recommendation in paragraph 24 of the VME workshop report as follows. While recognising that there is currently no CMM for research and exploratory fishing, the SC recommended that the MoP note that proposals for exploratory fishing both inside and outside of the current fishing footprint should provide information on VMEs and environmental data (e.g., bottom current, temperature, substrate type), and include consideration of the use of benthic cameras, and collection and retention of samples, etc. as a part of the research activity.

Para 279. The SC endorsed the recommendations in paragraph 36 of the VME workshop report that the SC develop research and data collection plans on how to fill the data gaps and hence reduce the uncertainty in its advice, and that the SC further develop the potential timelines given in the table on expected performance of different management measures and voluntary industry actions intended to minimize trawling effects (Annex L), and the table on pros and cons of the different categories of VME management measures available to SIOFA (Annex M). The SC noted that the development of research and data collection plans, while useful, are unlikely to result in the collection of much more VME data, because of the low frequency of vessels encountering VMEs in the SIOFA Area.

(End of Agenda Item 8.1)

9.2. MoP10 report (2023) noted the following

Nothing under MoP 10

10. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2024

10.1. The SC9 report (2024) noted the following

Under Agenda Item – 3.1.1 CCP annual National Fisheries Reports 2024

Para 18. China presented its Annual National Report. In the SIOFA Area, China operated three different types of fisheries intermittently from 2000 to 2017: Light seining targeting mackerel and Bramidae family; bottom longlining targeting ruby snapper, etc.; and demersal trawling targeting dories and orange roughy. From 2018-2022, China did not operate any SIOFA fisheries. Based on accumulated data and statistics, the report summarised fishing activities by Chinese-flagged vessels not targeting highly migratory fish stocks in SIOFA Area. The report noted that China has been authorising squid jigging since 2003 in the Indian Ocean. Since 2019, China has been a Contracting Party to SIOFA. In 2023, China registered two squid jigging vessels in the SIOFA Area, but only one of them fished in the SIOFA Area, doing so for two days with a catch of 2.1 kg of squid. In addition, China registered two scientific research vessels that combine pelagic trawling, squid jigging and pelagic longline fishing to conduct scientific surveys on fishery resources in the SIOFA Area in 2023. As of February 12, 2024, the two research vessels were still conducting a fishery resource survey in the SIOFA Area and nearby waters. China plans to elaborate on the relevant survey data and catch data in next year's national report.

Para 19. Some CCPs noted that they had only learned of China's research surveys in the SIOFA Area for the first time from China's National Report. The SC discussed the process by which research vessels can conduct activities in the SIOFA Area and the process by which such activities are notified to the Secretariat. The SC noted that there are currently no such processes in place and agreed to discuss this matter further under agenda item 4.

Para 20. The SC recommended that in future, the outcomes of such research activities should be presented in detail and as standalone papers.

(End of Agenda Item 3.1.1)

Under Agenda Item – 4.2 Development of new and exploratory fisheries

Para 95. The SC noted that there were two frameworks to consider: The first for fisheries that were "new and exploratory" and another one for "research cruises". The SC recommended that separate frameworks and processes would be needed for each. The SC further recommended that both frameworks should apply to all gears for any fishery falling under SIOFA's competence.

Para 103. The SC noted that scientific research is considered in the SIOFA Agreement and noted the need to ensure consistency in approaches for research cruises and scientific research.

Para 104. The SC recommended that the MoP define research cruises as single trips conducted by a dedicated research vessel under the scope of an SC activity, where the sale of commercial catch is not the primary objective of the trip.

Para 105. The SC recommended that the MoP develop a specific "research cruise CMM" that is separate from the process that is proposed for exploratory fisheries. This would ensure that these activities are appropriately sanctioned prior to the activity being undertaken and subsequently reported. This process should ensure that:

a. all research cruises require SIOFA authorisation.

b. a research cruise plan is submitted to the SIOFA SC for approval prior to conducting the cruise.

c. the MoP considers the recommendation of the SC and authorises the cruise.

d. the data are submitted to the Secretariat within 9 months of the end of the cruise.

e. the results of the research cruise are reported to the SC and the MoP.

f. no subsequent research cruise will be permitted by the organisation undertaking the cruise if they do not submit the data emanating from the cruise to the SIOFA Secretariat and a final detailed cruise report is submitted to and accepted by the next SC or within 1 year of completing the cruise.

(End of Agenda Item 4.2)

Under Agenda Item – 8.1 Deepwater chondrichthyans

Para 257. Mr Timmiss noted that, whilst there is a need for further research addressing bycatch mitigation measures for deepwater sharks and identifying efficient strategies, the available literature suggests that the prohibition of wire traces could be effective in reducing the bycatch of the most commonly caught species and genus of deepwater shark in the SIOFA Area.

(End of Agenda Item 8.1)

Under Agenda item 13 – Cooperation with external bodies

Para 386. The SC noted the preliminary report of the Monaco Exploration research cruise on the Saya de Malha Bank in 2022 (SC-09-INFO-25).

Para 388. The SC requested the Seychelles and Mauritius to continue efforts to contact Monaco Exploration, through the JMA, on accessing the data collected by the research cruise.

Para 391. The SC noted the proposal for a research cruise for the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen to be conducted in June 2025. The SC noted that the research vessel could provide valuable data for SIOFA but that there was currently limited information available on its activities for SIOFA SC to consider.

Para 392. The SC requested that the proponents of the research cruise provide a more detailed cruise plan to the MoP for consideration.

Para 393. The SC recommended that the MoP should consider the type of fishing gear, the areas proposed to be fished, potential benthic impacts, the species proposed to be caught and the amount of catch proposed to be taken before approving the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen research cruise.

(End of Agenda Item 13)

10.2. MoP11 report (2024) noted the following

Under Agenda Item – 5.2.5 New and Exploratory fisheries

Para 95. The MoP NOTED the recommendation in paragraph 95 of the SC9 report and NOTED that there were two frameworks to consider: The first for fisheries that were "new and exploratory" and another one for "research cruises". The MoP ENDORSED the SC's recommendations that separate frameworks and processes would be needed for each and that both frameworks should apply to all gears for any fishery falling under SIOFA's

(End of Agenda Item 5.2.5)

Under Agenda Item – 5.2.6 Framework for research cruises in SIOFA Area

Para 104. The MoP ENDORSED the recommendation in paragraph 104 of the SC9 report, and the MoP AGREED to define research cruises as single trips conducted by a dedicated research vessel under the scope of an SC activity, where the sale of commercial catch is not the primary objective of the trip. The MoP AGREED to consider developing a more comprehensive definition of research cruises when the MoP develops a specific research cruise CMM.

Para 105. The MoP ENDORSED the recommendation in paragraph 105 of the SC9 report that the MoP develop a specific "research cruise CMM" that is separate from the process that is proposed for exploratory fisheries. The MoP NOTED that this would ensure that these activities are appropriately sanctioned prior to the activity being undertaken and subsequently reported and AGREED that this process should ensure that:

a. all research cruises require SIOFA authorisation.

b. a research cruise plan is submitted to the SIOFA SC and that the SC assess and provide recommendations on the plan to the MoP, prior to the cruise being conducted.

c. the MoP considers the recommendations of the SC and the MoP authorises the cruise.

d. the data are submitted to the Secretariat within 9 months of the end of the cruise.

e. the results of the research cruise are reported to the SC and the MoP.

f. no subsequent research cruise will be permitted by the organisation undertaking the cruise if they do not submit the data emanating from the cruise to the SIOFA Secretariat and a final detailed cruise report is submitted to and accepted by the next SC or within 1 year of completing the cruise.

Para 106. The MoP NOTED the recommendation in paragraph 393 of the SC9 report to consider the type of fishing gear, the areas proposed to be fished, potential benthic impacts, the species proposed to be caught and the amount of catch proposed to be taken before approving the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen research cruise.

Para 107. The FAO DSF Project presented MoP-11-27 rev1, which detailed the plans for a research cruise by the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen in the Agreement Area. The FAO summarised the proposed activities, the impact assessment, and the potential benefits to SIOFA, and sought the approval of the MoP for the research cruise plan.

Para 108. The MoP NOTED the potential benefits of the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen research cruise and AGREED to approve the cruise plan, with the following conditions:

a. The Nansen Programme provides all the data gathered from this cruise to the SIOFA Secretariat within 9 months of the cruise end date.

b. That all Nansen Programme publications (including cruise reports and popular articles) and data that would be put in the public domain emanating from the research cruise must be approved by the SC or an SC advisory panel under the SIOFA data rules.

c. SC10 reviews and approves the specific scientific work, and the SC is given the opportunity to provide commentary on the work and specific tasks that are proposed in the cruise plan.

d. CCPs have opportunities to participate in the proposed work and CCP staff are given capacity building opportunities.

Para 109. The MoP NOTED that the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen has conducted research cruises in the Agreement Area in the past, REQUESTED that the Nansen Programme share data and key reports arising from these past research cruises, and TASKED the SC to review these data and reports.

Para 111. The FAO thanked the MoP for approving the research cruise and expressed its commitment to present an updated research plan with further details based on the points raised by the MoP.

Para 112. One of the CCPs raised concern on the proposed discards at sea of the catch emanating from the research cruise and suggested that all measures be taken to reduce or avoid any discards in line with the sustainable use of marine resources.

Para 113. It was clarified that the vessel, like most research vessels, does not have the storage capacity to retain fish and attempts will be made to use a commercial vessel to catch the fish when mark-ID tows are undertaken.

Para 115. China presented MoP-11-31, which outlined a draft plan for a Chinese research cruise in the 2024–2025 survey year. China explained that it intends to engage in scientific research on SIOFA-managed species to better understand the associated ecosystem and marine environment. Based on its 2023 high seas resource survey, China will continue to conduct scientific surveys in the SIOFA Area from October 2024 to March 2025 in the area of 9°S-10°N and 59°E-68°E. The purpose of the survey is to obtain preliminary scientific data on the species composition and quantity distribution of swimming organisms, plankton, fish eggs, and juvenile fish; grasp physical marine environmental features; and analyse the components of the pelagic marine ecosystems.

Para 116. In response to a question from the MoP, China confirmed that it will submit the data for SIOFA species from its planned research cruise to the SC. China explained that when doing so, it will follow the data reporting formats in Annex A and B of CMM 02(2023) (Data Standards) for longline and trawl gears but not for squid jigging gear, as there are currently no data submission forms for squid jigging. China reiterated its intention to provide squid jigging data submission templates to SC10.

(End of Agenda Item 5.2.6)

Agenda item 8 – Interim bottom fishing measures

Para 209. Mauritius emphasised the importance of applying the precautionary approach to prevent the potential negative impacts of bottom trawling on the Saya de Malha Bank, especially since it has a high species richness of benthic invertebrates dominated by small-sized organisms and potential for discovery of new species as reported by the Monaco Exploration research cruise conducted in the area, as stated under agenda item 10.3 of the SC8 report.

(End of Agenda Item 8)

11. Summary of recommendations and decisions from the Scientific Committee and Meeting of parties for 2025

11.1. The SC10 report (2025) noted the following

Under Agenda item 3.1.1 – CCP annual National Fisheries Reports

Para 19. China presented its Annual National Report. In the SIOFA Area, China operated four different types of fisheries intermittently from 2000 to 2017: Light seining targeting mackerel and Bramidae family; bottom longlining targeting ruby snapper, etc.; demersal trawling targeting dories and orange roughy; and squid jigging targeting squid. From 2018 to 2022, China did not operate any SIOFA fisheries. Based on accumulated data and statistics, the report summarised fishing activities by Chinese- flagged vessels not targeting highly migratory fish stocks in SIOFA Area. The report noted that China has been authorising squid jigging since 2003 in the Indian Ocean. Since 2019, China has been a Contracting Party to SIOFA. In 2023, China registered two squid jigging vessels in the SIOFA Area, but only one of them fished in the SIOFA Area, doing so for two days with a catch of 2.1 kg of squid. In 2024, both vessels operated in the SIOFA Area, catching 2368 kg of squid. In addition, China registered two scientific research vessels that combine pelagic trawling, squid jigging and pelagic longline fishing to conduct scientific surveys on fishery resources in the SIOFA Area in 2024. As of 1 February 2025, the two research vessels were still conducting a fishery resource survey in the SIOFA Area and nearby waters. China plans to elaborate on the relevant survey data and catch data in next year's national report.

Para 23. The SC encouraged China to continue to provide the outcomes of its scientific research in the SIOFA Area to future SC meetings.

(End of Agenda Item 3.1.1)

Under Agenda Item 4.6 – Proposals for revisions to CMM 02(2023) (Data Standards)

Para 119. The SC noted that if SIOFA adopts a CMM for research cruises, it may become necessary to amend CMM 02(2023) (Data Standards) to clearly identify data derived from research cruises.

(End of Agenda Item 4.6)

Under Agenda Item 5.2 – Review of new BFIAs

Para 131. Japan presented SC-10-80, which provided a revised BFIA for the Japanese bottom trawl fishery in the SIOFA Area conducted in accordance with paragraph 14 of CMM 01(2017) and the SIOFA BFIAs Standard (Annex I, SC2 Report) based on the best available information. In the SIOFA Area, three exploratory research fishing cruises were conducted by Japanese bottom trawl vessels in 1977, 1978, and 2012.

(End of Agenda Item 5.2)

Under Agenda Item 7.5 – Other species

Para 303. Dr Yue Jin (China) presented SC-10-54, which provided a scientific fisheries survey report from cruises conducted by China in the SIOFA Area in 2023–2024. From November 2023 to March 2024, two Chinese fisheries scientific research vessels, Lanhai 101 and Lanhai 201, conducted comprehensive fisheries resource surveys in the SIOFA Area, covering waters between 59°–68°E and 4°S–9°N. The survey involved mid-water trawling, squid jigging, and tuna longlining to study fisheries resources, as well as the distribution of plankton and fish eggs and larvae, and measurements of oceanographic physical characteristics. A total of 145 stations were surveyed to analyse biological community structures, resource distributions, and the relationship between environmental factors and fishing ground formation. Initial findings revealed a high density of fish eggs in the northern waters, indicating potential spawning grounds, and significantly enriched plankton communities

during night-time. In the southern waters, relatively higher temperatures and dissolved oxygen levels were observed, suggesting favourable habitats for midwater fisheries and potential migration pathways. Economically important species were identified, and their distributions were found to be closely linked to hydrological conditions, offering insights into ecosystem and population dynamics. This survey provided a scientific foundation for stock assessment and sustainable management in the region.

Para 304. The SC thanked China for conducting these research surveys and submitting the data to the SIOFA Secretariat, and noted that China plans to conduct further surveys in the same area in 2025 and 2026.

Para 305. Dr Zhou Fang (China) presented SC-10-55, which provided a brief introduction of the history of China's squid fisheries, including in the Indian Ocean. China's operations in the Indian Ocean began in 2003, targeting species such as *Sthenoteuthis oualaniensis*. Activities have expanded over time despite challenges such as piracy and unstable regional conditions. Since 2015, a stabilised fishing ground by Chinese squid fishing vessels has been established, with a focus on the north-western Indian Ocean, and Chinese squid-fishing resumed within the SIOFA Area in 2023. China is committed to the sustainable development of the squid resources in the Indian Ocean and has conducted extensive research in this area. Since 2022, China has implemented an independent high seas fishing moratorium policy in the northern Indian Ocean and aims to carry out further studies within the SIOFA Area in the future.

Para 306. The SC thanked China for presenting information about its squid fishery in the high seas of the Indian Ocean, including its operations, research, and policies.

(End of Agenda Item 7.5)

Under Agenda Item 9.5 – Management options for preventing SAIs on VMEs

432. The DSCC presented SC-10-INFO-22, which provided a review of different management arrangements to protect VMEs from significant adverse impacts. The DSCC proposed a review of encounter thresholds and the taxa subdivision for trawl and longline encounters with VME indicator taxa. The DSCC also looked at the Saya de Malha Bank and supported the protection of the area and the inclusion of sea grasses and rhodolith beds as VME indicator taxa. The DSCC noted that a Greenpeace research cruise of Saya de Malha in March 2021 had information that would be useful to SIOFA deliberations and expressed its intention to present the findings to a future meeting.

(End of Agenda Item 9.5)

Under Agenda Item 11.2 – Research cruises

Para 485. China informed the SC that it has recently completed another cruise from October 2024 to March 2025 and that it intends to submit the data to the SIOFA Secretariat and to present the results at SC11. China also expressed its intention to present the plans for its next research cruise to the MoP.

Para 489. Dr Tony Thompson, FAO DSF Project presented SC-10-59 on the upcoming R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen cruise in the Indian Ocean on 20 November to 10 December 2025, which provided details of the draft work plan. This cruise was presented to SC9 (SC-09-32-Rev1) and to MoP11 (MoP-11-27-Rev1). The MoP noted the potential benefits of the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen research cruise and agreed to approve the cruise plan, with certain conditions (para 108, MoP11 Report).

Para 495. The SC requested a revised work plan for the R.V. Dr Fridtjof Nansen research cruise be submitted that included the above suggestions.

Para 499. The SC noted the potential value of holding a workshop to explore opportunities for collaboration with research cruises by CCPs and other organisations to enhance SIOFA's scientific knowledge, including joint design of sampling programs to ensure consistency across different vessels and maximum utility of sampling data. The SC agreed to include such a workshop in its work plan.

Para 500. The SC noted the MoP's initial discussions on the development of a specific research cruise CMM and reaffirmed the SC9 recommendation that such a CMM be developed (para 105, SC9 Report).

(End of Agenda Item 11.2)

Under Agenda Item 13.3 – Climate change projects

Para 548. The SC noted that research on the potential effects of climate change on fisheries in shallower waters may be more advanced than that for deep-sea fisheries and requested CCPs to share any relevant research they may have, such as changes in diet or distribution.

Para 549. The SC noted that research and data needs related to climate change could be discussed as part of the planned workshop on the window of opportunity for research vessels.

(End of Agenda Item 13.3)

11.2. MoP12 report (2025) noted the following

Under Agenda Item 3.1 – Review of intersessional decisions taken since MoP11

Para 26. The MoP recalled another matter that had occurred in the intersessional period, albeit one that did not involve an intersessional decision. This matter concerned the notification sent by the Russian research vessel Atlantida to the Secretariat regarding its plans to conduct research activities in the SIOFA Area. The MoP discussed this matter further under agenda item 4.4.

(End of Agenda Item 3.1)

Under Agenda Item 4.4 – Listing of IUU fishing vessels

Para 64. The MoP discussed the notification sent by the Russian research vessel Atlantida to the Secretariat regarding its plans to conduct research trawls in the SIOFA Area in June 2025.

Para 65. The Executive Secretary explained that the vessel provided said notification to the Secretariat on 16 May 2025. In response, he sent a reply, on 20 May 2025, to the head of the expedition informing him of the process for conducting scientific research within the SIOFA Area as outlined in the Agreement and the CMMs but did not receive any reply. The Executive Secretary subsequently sent a follow-up seeking confirmation of receipt but received no reply once again.

Para 66. The MoP noted that the Executive Secretary's correspondence with the vessel's head of expedition clearly outlined that the proposed research activities within the SIOFA Area would constitute fishing and therefore require prior MoP approval and/or the vessel being on the SIOFA Record of Authorised Vessels (RAV), neither of which had occurred.

(End of Agenda Item 4.4)

Under Agenda Item 5.1.9 – New and Exploratory Fisheries and Research cruises

Para 170. The MoP NOTED paragraph 496 of the SC10 report and NOTED that the SC reviewed and approved the draft Nansen research cruise plan (SC-10-59-Rev1) subject to further

Para 172. The MoP NOTED paragraph 500 of the SC10 report and NOTED that the SC had reaffirmed the SC9 recommendation (para 105, SC9 Report) that a specific research cruise CMM be developed. The MoP held further discussions on the development of a research cruise CMM under agenda item 6.3.

(End of Agenda Item 5.1.9)

Under Agenda Item 6.3 – Scientific Research

Para 233. The EU presented MoP-12-48, a paper to facilitate continued discussions on developing a framework for research cruises and scientific research in the SIOFA Area. The paper built on a previous

EU proposal from MoP6 (2019) and considered SC discussions and recommendations from SC6 to SC10. The EU recognised that further development of the working paper is required, invited initial comments from CCPs, and welcomed further engagement from CCPs at the meetings of the MoP and its subsidiary bodies, as well as intersessionally, towards the adoption of a new CMM at MoP13.

Para 234. CCPs provided further feedback, including the following:

a. Refinement of the definition of "scientific research";

b. Clarification of whether a fishing vessel could be used as a research vessel and whether research vessels commissioned by a CCP that were not undertaking fishing activities needed to be registered on the SIOFA RAV and comply with the provisions of all SIOFA CMMs; and

c. Resolution of seemingly conflicting provisions in different paragraphs.

Para 235. Seychelles and Mauritius pointed out that they needed to consider the implications of the proposal on research conducted in the JMA and that they would present the proposal to the Joint Commission of the JMA for further review.

Para 236. The DSCC welcomed the proposal from the EU. The DSCC pointed out the need to consider the impact of research bottom trawling on VMEs or potential VMEs, including seamounts, and whether the proposed framework should make clear which current CMMs are being applied during planned research, for example when conducting research that would impact on the sea over closed areas or VMEs, including seamounts.

Para 237. Based on CCPs' feedback, the EU submitted an updated proposal (MoP-12-48-Rev1) as a basis for further intersessional work.

Para 238. The EU thanked the MoP for its feedback and indicated its intention to continue to work with CCPs to develop the proposal further and to present it to the SC workshop "Window of Opportunity – Research Vessels In SIOFA" (WS2025-ORS) and to SC11 for their input.

239. China presented MoP-12-50, which provided its draft research cruise plan for the 2025–2026 survey year. Building on its 2023 and 2024 high seas resource cruises, China intends to continue to conduct scientific surveys in the SIOFA area from October 2025 to March 2026 in the area of 9°S–10°N and 59°E–68°E to contribute to the scientific research on SIOFA managed species and their associated ecosystem and environment. Specifically, the survey is aimed at gaining a preliminary understanding of the species composition and quantity distribution of swimming organisms, plankton, fish eggs, and juvenile fish in the surveyed waters; grasping the physical marine environmental characteristics of the surveyed waters; and analysing the components of the pelagic marine ecosystems in the surveyed waters. China will submit the results of its research surveys to the SC.

Para 240. The MoP NOTED China's draft plan for a research cruise in the SIOFA Area and the purpose of the research cruise, which is to collect scientific data for research on SIOFA

(End of Agenda Item 6.3)

Under Agenda Item 14.2.1 – FAO ABNJ Deep Sea Fisheries Project

Para 411. The Executive Secretary reported that the Secretariat participated in the observer training capacity building workshop and that it will participate in the workshop on deepwater sharks and joint research cruise with the R/V Nansen.

(End of Agenda Item 14.2.1)