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

**11th Annual Meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC11)**

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**SC-11-37**

# Conveners' Report of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) Scientific Committee (SC) Workshop: Window of Opportunity- Research Vessels in SIOFA (WS2025-ORS)

The SIOFA Secretariat on behalf of the Workshop Conveners

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**Abstract**

This paper presents the Conveners' Report of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) Scientific Committee (SC) Workshop: Window of Opportunity - Research Vessels in SIOFA (WS2025-ORS). The recommendations of this paper summarize the recommendations given in the report.

[1] Restricted documents may contain confidential information. Please do not distribute restricted documents in any form without the explicit permission of the SIOFA Secretariat and the data owner(s)/provider(s).
[2] Documents available only to members invited to closed sessions.

**Recommendations**

The following is a list of recommendations from the Workshop Report:

- The Workshop recommended the SC considers the data currently available on past research cruises in the SIOFA Area and how to retrieve any missing data.
- The Workshop recommended that VME mapping should be one of the top priorities for research cruises in the SIOFA Area.
- The Workshop recommended that the SC considers the importance of knowledge gaps on alfonsino larval stages, and discusses the steps needed to provide advice on this topic.
- The Workshop noted that the SC would need to consider the objectives of any proposed research and evaluate whether the importance of research activities is greater than their impact on resources in the SIOFA Area. The SC would also need to consider whether the objectives of any proposed research cruise address the objectives of the SC and the MoP. The SC should prioritise the work noting that, for research cruises, higher priority should be given to tasks that cannot easily be undertaken by fishing vessel during their normal operations.
- The Workshop requested the Conveners prepare a paper to be submitted to SC11, detailing the administrative steps to include the research needs in SIOFA into the research cruise plan and realistic schedules for research cruises in the SIOFA Area.
- The Workshop recommended that the SC consider the comments on MoP-12-48-Rev1 provided during the Workshop, if this document or a revision is submitted to the SC.

# Conveners' Report of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) Scientific Committee (SC) Workshop: Window of Opportunity - Research Vessels in SIOFA (WS2025-ORS)

Virtual

4 November 2025

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## Agenda item 1 – Opening of the Workshop

**a. Welcome from Conveners**

1. The Workshop was convened by Dr Sebastián Rodríguez Alfaro (European Union) and Dr Zhou Fang (China).
2. The Conveners opened the Workshop and welcomed the participants.

**b. Introduction of meeting participants**

3. The list of registered participants is included in Annex A.

## Agenda item 2 – Administrative arrangements

**a. Adoption of the meeting objectives and agenda**

4. The meeting objectives (WS2025-ORS-ADM-03) and agenda (WS2025-ORS-ADM-04) were adopted.

**b. Appointment of rapporteurs**

5. The SIOFA Science Officer, Dr Marco Milardi, served as rapporteur and supported the Conveners in preparing the Conveners' report.
6. The Conveners and the Science Officer introduced the meeting and report arrangements.
7. The Conveners noted that the draft conveners' report would be circulated to the Workshop participants by 17 November 2025 and invited them to provide their comments by 4 January 2026. The Workshop report, once revised, would be submitted to SC11 by the deadline for the submission of documents, on 21 February 2026.

**c. Introduction of the existing documents in support of the specific meeting objectives**

8. The Conveners advised the Workshop that the meeting documents are available on the dedicated page on the SIOFA website (https://siofa.org/meetings/WS2025-ORS)

## Agenda item 3 – Research cruises in SIOFA

**a. Previous (until 2024)**

9. The Conveners made reference to WS2025-ORS-02, where previous research cruises are described. In 2018 the FAO Nansen programme conducted a habitat survey in the Saya de Malha bank. This same area was surveyed in 2022 by the Monaco Exploration. In 2023 China conducted scientific surveys on squid. In 2024-2025 there were Chinese scientific surveys on multiple fishery resources.
10. The FAO noted that there were two other Nansen surveys, in 2009 and 2015, of which data were shared with the Secretariat earlier this year (SC10 Report, paragraph 486). FAO also noted that there might be further information on benthic surveys in the SIOFA Area by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Agulhas and Somali Current Large Marine Ecosystem Project (ASCLME), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Zoological Society of London, in a 2010 FAO report, which they shared with the meeting. Potentially, more information is also included in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) report on Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs).
11. Japan noted that research surveys for fishery resources have been conducted in the Indian Ocean, and that this information is already included in their Bottom Fishing Impact Assessment (BFIA) and was reported to SC2 (SC-02-04 (04)). However, at present they have

no further information on research cruises that were conducted in the SIOFA Area, and they will follow up and report in future meetings.

12. SIODFA noted that there was information available from research by the Japan Marine Fishery Resource Research Center in the Indian Ocean in the 1960/70s. SIODFA has a copy of one book and can provide further information. SIODFA also noted the research conducted in the 1970s by the Soviet Union (Kerch) (FAO Fisheries Circular 991 2003), and fisheries research conducted by FAO in Area 51 described in a publication consisting of several volumes published in 1985.
13. The Cook Islands raised the question on whether the Workshop would focus solely on research cruises, or whether research done on vessels of opportunity would also be included in the discussion. The Conveners clarified that the Workshop should focus on research cruises, without diminishing the importance of research conducted through vessels of opportunity.
14. The Conveners thanked all participants for the constructive discussion on the past research cruises and encouraged countries that hold relevant information to share it with the SC.

**b. Current (2025-2026)**

15. The Conveners made reference to document WS2025-ORS-02 rev. 1, where current research cruises are described. In 2025, the FAO EAF Nansen programme will conduct a research cruise in the SIOFA Area. In 2025, SIOFA was also made aware of Russian research activities conducted in the SIOFA area of competence (MoP12, paragraphs 64-69).
16. FAO briefly described the 2025 Nansen cruise in the SIOFA Area plan, which will produce a brief preliminary report that will be submitted to SC11, and with fuller reports planned to be prepared for the future as analysis is completed. FAO stressed that SIOFA is a partner of this cruise and will be co-owning the data produced by the cruise.

**c. Planned (2027 and beyond)**

17. The Workshop noted that there may be Chinese research cruises in 2027, but these are not yet confirmed. China noted that they will submit information on these cruises to the SC once confirmed.

## Agenda item 4 – Research needs

**a. Knowledge gaps and research needs in SIOFA previously identified by the SC**

18. The Conveners noted paper WS2025-ORS-01, which contains a summary of the SIOFA SC and MoP reports on research needs. This paper included several topics on the research needs of SIOFA, and underlines some of the data gaps in the Indian Ocean.
19. The Workshop noted that there were areas of severe data scarcity in the Indian Ocean that need to be urgently filled, particularly in Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. The Workshop highlighted the cost-effective role of the industry vessels as platforms for collecting data, the utility of the combination of electronic and human monitoring in the context of research, and the progress on the SIOFA databases. The workshop also thanked the F.T. *Will Watch* and associated personnel for their collaboration.
20. The Workshop noted past discussions on the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs). Despite being the focus of past SC work, VME distribution remains still largely unknown in SIOFA and the main bottleneck for this research is that it typically cannot be conducted by fishing vessels. Research vessels are uniquely placed to conduct this type of research, and research cruises on this topic should be prioritized.

21. Thailand noted that the Saya de Malha bank could be a priority area for this research.

**b. Identification of current research needs in the SIOFA Area**

22. SIODFA noted the importance of lack of knowledge gaps about the larval stages of alfonsino, which are currently poorly understood. They also noted that research vessels are uniquely placed to sample larval alfonsino using bongo nets - sampling that is usually not able to be done from fishing vessels. SIODFA noted that it was unaware of experts able to analyse samples collected from such sampling and acknowledged that several difficult steps would be needed to undertake this work and before any results could be considered by the SC.
23. The Workshop noted the data collection related to climate change were also a potential research need as per previous SC discussions.

## Agenda item 5 – Exploring the administrative steps to include the research needs in SIOFA into the research cruise plan.

24. The Conveners introduced the topic of administrative steps and opened the floor to comments from the Workshop on how best to tackle the discussion.
25. The Workshop noted that knowing the availabilities and capabilities of research vessels would be important to identify the potential to carry out research needs.
26. The Workshop noted that the SC would need to consider the objectives of proposed research and evaluate whether the importance of such research activities would be greater than their impact on the target of investigation.
27. The Workshop noted that the importance of research vessels is that they can conduct research that unlikely to be possible on fishing vessels. Any proposed research plans should underline where research vessels provide an added value that would not be achieved otherwise.
28. The FAO underlined that the Regional Fishing Management Organisations rarely have the resources to fund research cruises, so that there is a need to find time- and cost-effective ways to carry out this research, including the opportunity to co-finance research activities.
29. The Workshop noted the need to seek the guidance from the MoP on the identification of management needs which could be used by the SC to develop a research priority list. This list should include research priorities which are to be fulfilled through research cruises, and could be used as guidance by CCPs and third-party organizations when planning research cruises in the SIOFA Area. This would also allow CCPs to join efforts when planning cruises, or tasks during cruises that could be supported by more than one actor.
30. The Workshop noted that with the coming into force of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, there might be further stimulus to conduct research in the SIOFA Area and noted that discussion would be needed on how best to conduct and present research in the area under the Agreement.

## Agenda item 6 – Identification of realistic schedules in line with potential research cruise plans

31. The Workshop emphasised the need for long lead-times ahead of research cruises, to facilitate sourcing funding for specific at-sea research tasks. Longer lead-times would also allow planning and committing of resources for research and post-cruise analyses.

## Agenda item 7 – Consideration of the draft "SIOFA Framework on fisheries based and scientific research" (MoP-12-48-Rev1)

32. The Conveners presented the paper "SIOFA Framework on fisheries based and scientific research" (MoP-12-48-Rev1), discussed previously during MoP12.
33. The Workshop offered suggestions on the wording of the document, including the distinction between research and fishing vessels, the administrative aspects of the process to submit and get authorization for research cruises, emphasising the need to provide clarity on the area of application of the CMM and referring to the mandate of the Agreement.
34. The Workshop noted that research on VMEs could also fall within the scope of the Agreement as the environmental aspect of fisheries management is frequently referred to in the Agreement.
35. SIODFA noted that there is a difference between research cruises carried out by research vessels and research conducted by fishing vessels, so that some wording could be further elaborated to clarify the two roles.
36. The Workshop noted the need to incorporate clear timelines for the provision of data and reporting to the SC on the research activities to be conducted. The Workshop also noted that wording could be included to describe any potential co-financing of the research activities.
37. The Worksop further noted that if SIOFA adopts a CMM for research cruises, it may become necessary to amend CMM 02(2025) (Data Standards) to clearly identify the data and data access arrangements from research cruises.

## Agenda item 8 – Recommendations for SC11 consideration

38. The Workshop recommended the SC considers the data currently available on past research cruises in the SIOFA Area and how to retrieve any missing data.
39. The Workshop recommended that VME mapping should be one of the top priorities for research cruises in the SIOFA Area.
40. The Workshop recommended that the SC considers the importance of knowledge gaps on alfonsino larval stages, and discusses the steps needed to provide advice on this topic.
41. The Workshop noted that the SC would need to consider the objectives of any proposed research and evaluate whether the importance of research activities is greater than their impact on resources in the SIOFA Area. The SC would also need to consider whether the objectives of any proposed research cruise address the objectives of the SC and the MoP. The SC should prioritise the work noting that, for research cruises, higher priority should be given to tasks that cannot easily be undertaken by fishing vessel during their normal operations.
42. The Workshop requested the Conveners prepare a paper to be submitted to SC11, detailing the administrative steps to include the research needs in SIOFA into the research cruise plan and realistic schedules for research cruises in the SIOFA Area.
43. The Workshop recommended that the SC consider the comments on MoP-12-48-Rev1 provided during the Workshop, if this document or a revision is submitted to the SC.

## Agenda item 9 – Meeting Close

44. The Conveners thanked the participants for their participation and contribution.
45. The meeting was closed at 08:45 UTC, 4 November 2025.

## Annex A – List of registered participants

| Delegation | Title | First name | Last name | Position | Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| China | Dr | Heng | Zhang | HoD | East China Sea Fisheries Research Institute, China Academy of Fisheries Science |
| China | Dr | Yue | Jin | Advisor | Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Fishery Science |
| China | Mr | Jun | Yu | Advisor | Shanghai Ocean University |
| China | Dr | Jiaqi | Wang | Advisor | Shanghai Ocean University |
| China | Ms | Tinglin | Li | Advisor | China Overseas Fisheries Association |
| Cook Islands | Dr | Stephen | Brouwer | HoD | Ministry of Marine Resources Cook Islands |
| Cook Islands | Mr | Lualua | Tua-Trood | Alternate | Ministry of Marine Resources |
| Cook Islands | Ms | Tiare-Renee | Nicholas | Alternate | Ministry of Marine Resources |
| France OT | Dr | Alexis | Martin | SC HoD | MNHN |
| France OT | Mrs | Adèle | Moisan | MoP HoD | DGAMPA |
| Japan | Dr | Takehiro | Okuda | Head of Delegation Scientific Committee | Fisheries Resources Institute, Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency |
| Japan | Dr | Midori | Hashimoto | SC Alternate | Fisheries Resources Institute, Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency |
| Japan | Mr | Taisuke | Iwano | Alternate | Fisheries Agency Government of Japan |
| Japan | Mr | Kazuki | Tsuda | Advisor | Fisheries Agency Government of Japan |
| Mauritius | Dr | Luvna | Caussy | Scientific Officer | Ministry of Agro-industry, Food-security, Blue Economy & Fisheries |
| Mauritius | Mr | Kawol | Doorvanand | Senior Technical Officer | Ministry of Agro-industry, Food-security, Blue Economy & Fisheries |
| Seychelles | Ms | Sabrena | Lawrence | HOD | Seychelles Fisheries Authority |
| Seychelles | Ms | Dainise | Quatre | Observer | Seychelles Fisheries Authority |
| Thailand | Mr | Pavarot | Noranarttragoon | HoD | Department of Fisheries |
| Thailand | Mr | Weerapol | Thitipongtrakul | Alternate | Department of Fisheries |
| Thailand | Ms | Supranee | Chatthong | Alternate | Department of Fisheries |
| Thailand | Ms | Jidapa | Setthatham | Alternate | Department of Fisheries |
| Observers - FAO | Dr | Anthony | Thompson | Observer | Deep-sea Fisheries project, FAO |

| Delegation | Title | First name | Last name | Position | Organisation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observers - SIODFA | Dr | Ross | Shotton | Exec. Sec | SIODFA |
| Observers - SIODFA | Mr | Charles | Heaphy | HoD | SIODFA |
| Convener | Dr | Sebastián | Rodríguez Alfaro | HoD | Marine Sciences/EU |
| Convener | Dr | Zhou | Fang | Alternate | Shanghai Ocean University |
| SIOFA SC Chair | Mr | Alistair | Dunn | SC Chair | Ocean Environmental |
| SIOFA SC Vice Chair | Ms | Charlotte | Chazeau | SC Alternate | MNHN |
| SIOFA SC Vice Chair | Dr | Zhou | Fang | Alternate | Shanghai Ocean University |
| SIOFA Secretariat | Mr | Thierry | Clot | Executive Secretary | SIOFA Secretariat |
| SIOFA Secretariat | Mr | Pierre | Peries | Data Officer | SIOFA Secretariat |
| SIOFA Secretariat | Mr | Johnny | Louys | Compliance Officer | SIOFA Secretariat |
| SIOFA Secretariat | Dr | Marco | Milardi | Science Officer | SIOFA Secretariat |