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EU funding proposal SIOFA SEAs

Relate to agenda item: 9.3

Working paper Info paper Restricted

SIOFA Secretariat

Abstract

This document summarises the proposal submitted by the SC Chairs and the Secretariat to EU for funding several studies to take place mid-2022 end 2023.

SIOFA SEAs

INTRO

In January 2022, the SIOFA Secretariat responded to an invitation to submit a proposal by the EU (EMFAF-2021-VC-SIOFA-IBA), specifically aimed at strengthening the scientific basis for decision-making in the SIOFA area. A project proposal (Acronym: SIOFA-SEAs, Proposal number: 101078892) was quickly drafted by the Secretariat and the chairs of WGs and SC, and submitted to the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) to meet the deadline of the call. If successful, SIOFA-SEAs will receive a financial contribution of up to 100 000 euro, which is aimed at the recruitment of technical consultants that would carry out scientific work for a total duration of 18 months (July 2022 – December 2023)

PROPOSAL

The SIOFA SEAs proposal includes three strategic work components, focusing on the SIOFA Area:

1. the assessment of Protected Areas in SIOFA;
2. the improvement of scientific understanding of Patagonian toothfish population spatial structure;
3. the establishment of a framework for scientific observation of fisheries.

WP 1: Assessment of protected areas in SIOFA

SIOFA Conservation and Management Measures (CMM) 2021/01, Interim management of bottom fishing, Paragraph 44 and Annex 3) designate five Protected Areas in the SIOFA area (Atlantis Bank, Coral, Fools Flat, Middle of What, and Walter's Shoal). The establishment and management of protected areas is a scientifically driven continuous, dynamic, participatory and systematic process. It is therefore important to ensure that the process of scientific evaluation of protected areas in SIOFA is continued, including development of the scientifically based protocols for their designation.

WP1 has three objectives:

- **Objective 1: Develop an understanding of benthic organism diversity in the protected areas**
- **Objective 2: Determine the fish catch composition from the protected areas**
- **Objective 3: Provide an understanding of the population structure of the benthos and fish**

WP 2: Improve scientific understanding of Patagonian toothfish population spatial structure in the

SIOFA area

Marine animal populations are not distributed homogeneously in space and time but exhibit spatial patterns of distribution driven by ecological relationships. Understanding of the factors that drive these relationships, and hence the patterns of distribution, requires robust scientific understanding in order to ensure sustainable management, especially for species that are of commercial or conservation interest.

SIOFA conservation and management measures (CMM 2021/15, Management of demersal stocks, Paragraphs 27-29) requires that the Scientific Committee (SC) makes recommendations to build an area wide habitat model, undertakes spatial and temporal CPUE analyses, and estimates and maps local abundance to assess the population. The SC is also required to advise on improvements to data collection to reduce future assessment uncertainty. In addition, the SC is required to address issues related to depredation and advise on appropriate catch limits for species caught as bycatch in the Patagonian toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*) target fishery.

Currently there is little information on the population extent and spatial structure of toothfish in the SIOFA Area.

WP2 has four objectives:

- **Objective 1: Model the spatial extent and potential distribution of Patagonian toothfish in the SIOFA area, focusing on del Cano Rise and the southwest Indian Ridge**
- **Objective 2: Evaluate the ecological importance of each area, and, where possible, local scale spatial structure of potential VMEs, benthos, and important bycatch species**
- **Objective 3: Model toothfish abundance and relationships to local physical and biological characteristics**
- **Objective 4: Classify the local abundance in terms of juvenile, mature and/or spawning abundance**

WP 3: Establish a framework for scientific observation of fisheries in SIOFA

The SIOFA conservation and management measures (CMM 2021/02, Data standards, Paragraph 17) require that the Meeting of the Parties, based on recommendations from the Scientific Committee and the Compliance Committee, adopt a framework for scientific observation clarifying the aspects related to the role.

In 2021, the SIOFA Scientific Committee undertook an intersessional workshop on the harmonisation of scientific observer standards and the evaluation process for CCPs scientific observer programmes. In addition, at this workshop, discussions on observer e-monitoring schemes were also conducted. The intersessional workshop on the Harmonisation of Scientific Observers' Programme to initiate development of the SIOFA framework for scientific observation took place in October to November 2021 and provided key recommendations on the structure and future workplan to develop and finalise the SIOFA framework for scientific observation.

WP3 has five objectives:

- **Objective 1: Analysis of CCPs observers' programmes**
- **Objective 2: Identify synergies for improving scientific observer management and optimising coverage and deployment in relation to pandemic constraints**
- **Objective 3: Describe and recommend potential tools and operational characteristics for electronic observer monitoring on board vessels**
- **Objective 4: Proposal for amending SIOFA CMMs on Data Standards, in Annex B (Observer Data)**
- **Objective 5: Develop a proposal for a CMM for regulation of observer harmonisation in SIOFA**

IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

Targeted scientific research will be commissioned to provide specific advice to the SIOFA SC, and hence form the basis of recommendations to the SIOFA MoP to achieve the project objectives.

The SIOFA SEAs Project Team will be responsible for the project management and development of consultant Terms of Reference for each objective within each Working Package. The SIOFA Scientific Officer will provide scientific and technical support to the SIOFA SEAs Project, as well as coordinating the review of reports and submission of recommendations to the SIOFA Scientific Committee and its Working Groups.

For each work package, specific Terms of Reference (ToRs) will be developed for each objective by the SIOFA SEAs Project Team and will be allocated to suitably qualified consultants via a competitive tendering process. Technical workshops will be used to provide specific technical advice as required within each Working Package.

The SIOFA Scientific Committee under the authority of the Scientific Committee chairperson will organize virtual meetings with the Project Team to coordinate and oversee each project and the development of the work with the workplan packages to determine the issues to be resolved.

The SIOFA Scientific Committee Heads of Delegation will provide peer review of draft reports and final reports will be submitted to the Scientific Committee (and its Working Groups where appropriate). These Scientific Committee and its Working Group are open to observers, invited experts, and States bordering the SIOFA Area.

Review and evaluation of the final reports will be by the SIOFA SEAs Project Team and the SIOFA Scientific Committee Heads of Delegation. Final reports will be submitted to the SC, along with the report recommendations, for consideration by the SC. Recommendations arising from these reports by the SC will be presented to the SIOFA MoP for consideration, including any revisions of policy or CMMs required to implement these recommendations.