

SC-03-06.3.2 (09)

3rd Meeting of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) Scientific
Committee
20-24 March 2017, Saint Denis, La Reunion

Proposal for designation of the 'MID INDIAN RIDGE' fishery closure for
the purpose of the protection of its unique geographic
representativeness

Relates to agenda item: 6.3.2

Working paper Info paper

Delegation of Australia

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose that the Mid Indian Ridge feature meets the following criteria under the SIOFA Standard protocol for protected areas designation (see Annex H of SC2 report):

3a. Geographic and/or unique representation – The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage.

Recommendations *(working papers only)*

It is recommended that the SC:

- **Note** that the proposed Mid Indian Ridge feature meets the following criteria in the protocol: 3a. Geographic and/or unique representation – The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage.
 - **Recall** Article 4(c) of the Agreement which obliges Contracting Parties to apply the precautionary approach in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement, whereby the absence of adequate scientific information shall not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures.
 - **Recommend** to the Meeting of the Parties that, in line with the precautionary approach, the Mid Indian Ridge feature be designated as an interim fishery closure for the purpose of the protection of its unique geographic representativeness, with a prohibition on all fishing to be reviewed after 2 to 5 years.
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Proposal for designation of the 'MID INDIAN RIDGE' fishery closure for the purpose of the protection of its unique geographic representativeness

Australia

Acknowledgement

Australia have prepared this proposal in consultation with the Cook Islands, SIODFA, Ms Lynda Goldsworthy AM, and an informal steering committee of SIOFA SC members who met to advise Australia on its review of the SIOFA Standard protocol for future protected areas designation.

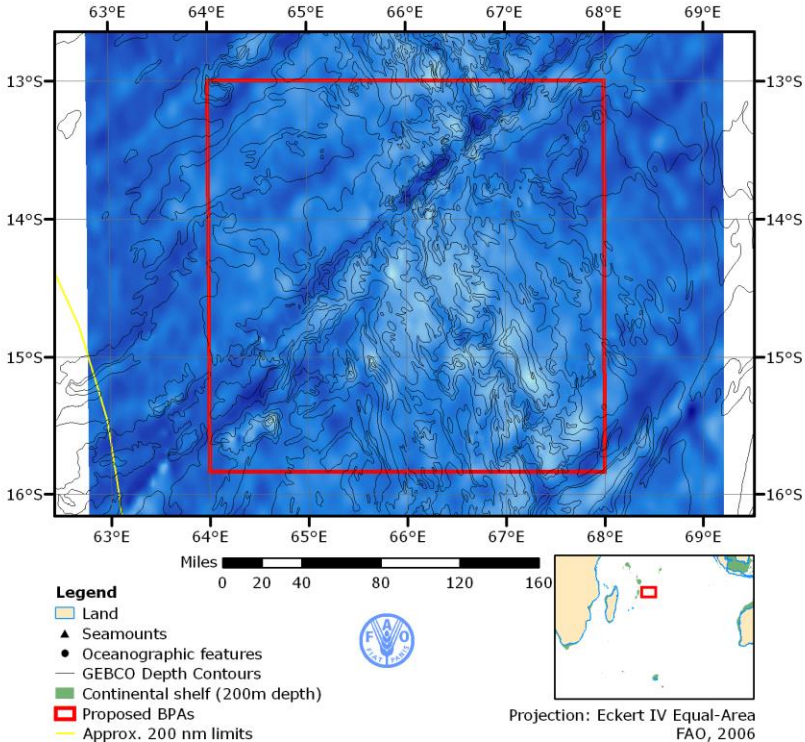
Purpose and rationale

The purpose of this paper is to propose that the Mid Indian Ridge feature meets the following criteria under the SIOFA Standard protocol for protected areas designation (see Annex H of SC2 report):

- 3a. Geographic and/or unique representation – The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage.

Background

At the 4th Meeting of the Parties in 2017, Australia signalled its intention to review the SIODFA 'benthic protected areas' against the protocol for protected area designation. The proposal follows a template suggested at the intersessional meeting of the informal SIOFA steering committee in November 2017.

<p>Name</p>	<p>Mid-Indian Ridge</p>
<p>Proponent/s</p>	<p>Australia, Cook Islands (SIOFA Contracting Parties) <i>Prepared in collaboration with the Southern Indian Ocean Deepsea Fishers Association (SIOFA Observer)</i></p>
<p>Geographic description</p>	<p>Total area: 135,688 km² Coordinates: 13°00'S-64°00'E : 15°50'S-68°00'E Bathymetry: 0-100 m 0 km²; 101-300 m 0 km²; 301-700 m 0 km²; 701-1000 m 0 km²; 1001-1500 m 6 km²; > 1500 m 135,688 km²</p> <p>Figure 1 Bathymetry and boundary of the Mid-Indian Ridge area</p> 
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>The objective for designation of this proposed protected area is the protection of its unique geographic representation.</p>
<p>Criteria that the protected area meets</p>	<p>This protected area meets the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>3a. Geographic and/or unique representation</u> – The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage. <p><u>Feature description</u></p> <p>The Mid-Indian Ridge lies to the northeast of Mauritius and has been described as ‘Triple Junction’ as the Australian, African and Indian tectonic plates meet in this area. It is an area of a series of 990 seamounts rising to 650 m in warm waters (SIODFA 2016). Specific hills occur in the region of 15°39’ S, 64°14’ E.</p>

	<p>This area is assumed to be biologically pristine and an area where corals are vulnerable to bycatch from deepwater fishing operations (SIODFA 2016). The area is proposed by SIODFA (2016) as representative of the tropical bioregion of the Southern Indian Ocean, complementing the Prince Edward Island Marine Protected Area and the Heard Island and McDonald Islands World Heritage Area.</p> <p><u>Geographic and geomorphological representation</u></p> <p>The evidence provided for protection of the seamounts as geographically significant is more compelling than the biological case for protected area status. SC documents support the claim that there are numerous seamounts in this area. Claims that the benthic biota would be damaged by deepwater fishing is supported by SC (SC-01-INFO-26).</p>
Social, cultural and economic interests	<p>Historical fishing data may assist with understanding any social, cultural and/or economic costs associated with designating this as a protected area. It is possible that designation could have adverse social, cultural or economic impacts in terms of forgone opportunity for fishing.</p>
Proposed activities to be restricted or prohibited	<p>Fishing within this proposed area with all gears could detrimentally impact the feature. The MoP should consider closure to all fishing.</p>
Review periods	<p>The scientific evidence to support a closure is uncertain and it is proposed that this fishery closure be regarded as an interim measure in accordance with the requirements of the precautionary approach. It is recommended that this designation be reviewed after 2 and not more than 5 years, or sooner if new information becomes available that enhances or degrades the justification for its protection.</p>
Outline of monitoring and/or research needed	<p>A desk-top compilation of publications from research undertaken within this area would assist with future reviews of the designation.</p>
Compliance	<p>Compliance-related issues are outside of the remit of the SIOFA SC.</p>

References

SIODFA 2016, Southern Indian Ocean Deepwater Fisheries Association (SIODFA), Benthic Protected Areas in the Southern Indian Ocean. SIODFA Technical Report XVII 16/01. 40 pp