

SC-03-INFO-06

3rd Meeting of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) Scientific
Committee

20-24 March 2017, Saint Denis, La Reunion

Summary of the November 2017 meeting of the informal protected areas 'steering committee'

Relates to agenda item: 6.3.1

Working paper Info paper

Delegation of Australia

Abstract

This paper provides a record of a meeting of an informal SIOFA protected areas 'steering committee' in November 2017.

Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement – 1st meeting of the SIOFA Scientific Committee’s informal ‘Protected Areas Steering Committee’

Phone meeting

22 November 2017, 6.00PM AEDT

Key outcomes

- Australia to prepare a working paper for SC3 that summarises the utility of the protocol and criteria for protected areas designation, drawing on the work of Goldsworthy (2017) that applied the draft protocol and criteria to the Benthic Protected Areas proposed by the Southern Indian Ocean Deepsea Fishers Association (SIODFA).
 - This paper will propose a number of modifications to the existing criteria and also outline a template for protected area proposals (with some examples of the data/information needs for each criteria).
 - Australia would circulate this draft to members to elicit comments before the SC paper submission deadline. This should make the paper collaborative in its formation and ensure that all member views are well understood before SC3 so discussion at the SC3 can be efficient and productive.
- Develop a proposal for four protected area nominations to submitted to SC3 for recommendation/endorsement to go to the Meeting of the Parties
 - These will include proposed protected areas that are considered to meet the protocol and criteria for designation.
 - Australia will contact the Cook Islands and SIODFA to propose this as a joint proposal from the two members and observer.

Summary record

1. Welcome and introductions (Chair [Simon Nicol]/all)

Attendees were welcomed and introduced. The names and affiliations of those who attended are included at Annex 1.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without any changes.

3. Objective of the meeting (Chair)

The Chair (Dr Simon Nicol) recalled the second meeting of the SIOFA Scientific Committee (SC2) at which the SC drafted a standard protocol and criteria for evaluating the proposal and designation of SIOFA protected areas. It was noted that the development of this protocol and criteria was quite rushed and that the criteria were untested in the SIOFA context.

Australia secured limited funding to engage a consultant to address this shortcoming by testing the application of the criteria. The consultant was requested to use the SIODFA-proposed Benthic Protected Areas (see paper SC01-INF15) as case studies, and in doing so, explore the relevance and applicability of the protocol and criteria. Ms Lynda Goldsworthy AM was engaged as the consultant to provide this review. It was noted that Ms Goldsworthy’s strong background

in developing proposals for marine protected areas would help identify weaknesses and ambiguities in the agreed criteria.

As such, the primary objectives of the meeting were to:

- Update the informal SIOFA 'Protected Areas Steering Committee' on this work
- Consider the development of a working paper to SC3 that explores the suitability of the criteria for proposing protected areas
- Consider whether a formal proposal for a protected area or areas could be put forward to SC3.

4. Appointment of rapporteur/s (Chair)

Mr Lee Georgeson (Australia) was appointed as rapporteur. It was agreed that a summary of the meeting would be provided to participants and those that were unable to attend within a few days of the meeting.

5. Review of SIODFA proposed BPAs (Ms Lynda Goldsworthy AM)

Ms Goldsworthy introduced the work that has been undertaken to date. It was noted that the review predominantly relied on information that was included in the SIODFA proposal. Limited additional information that was easily accessible was also used.

Ms Goldsworthy noted that additional information was probably available that could be used to improve the rationale for closure of a number of the SIODFA areas if a SIOFA member decided to prepare a proposal. She also advised that explicit referencing would also help to demonstrate the rationale for a number of areas. She suggested that where references were not available, skipper affidavits could add additional credibility to statements made in support of protected area proposals.

Rationale for area designation

It was noted that the criteria relating to VME encounters¹ was not found to be particularly useful and that such information could be better viewed as additional information to support a proposal as opposed to forming a criteria on its own. All other criteria were thought to be useful but it was noted that many could be refined.

Ms Goldsworthy suggested that criteria 7² could be amended to suggest that the 'best available information' is used. This was in relation to the potential subjectivity around what constitutes 'all available information'. This was discussed again under next steps.

¹ VME encounter reported for the area proposed

- a. Closure may be warranted if there is consistent triggering of VME move-on rules, indicating potential VME.

² All available information should be considered in decision-making and the precautionary principle applied.

- a. Recommendations must be informed by the available information. All available information should include ecological, environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects of the marine environment that is available without unreasonable cost, effort or loss of timeliness.
- b. Recommendations to implement spatial management measures should not be postponed because of a lack of full scientific certainty, especially where significant or irreversible damage to ecosystems could occur or indigenous species are at risk of extinction.

Area dimensions

It was noted that most of the previous SIODFA proposals met protocol guidance. Minor issues with the area coordinates for the Middle of What (MOW) were noted and these should be specified more clearly if this site was to be proposed into the future.

There was also a query around the size of the Atlantis Bank proposed area and it was noted that this needs clarification.

Several proposals fitted best under the 'bioregional representation' criteria³. However, it was noted that the lack of information on the bioregional characteristics of the entire SIOFA area made it challenging to assess proposals against this criteria.

Social, cultural and economic dimensions

Ms Goldsworthy noted that these requirements were not explicitly addressed in any of the SIODFA proposals she was asked to assess. She noted that this was probably because these proposals were formulated before the criteria were established and these dimensions were not included in the previous material. She recommended to review available information relating to these dimensions before any proposals are finalised. In relation to this point, it was noted that more detail around historical levels of fishing is informative for these dimensions, but that this information could be difficult to obtain for some areas.

Other considerations

Ms Goldsworthy noted that the existing material could be strengthened with additional referencing. It was suggested that guidance detailing the sorts of information and referencing required for protected area proposals could be included as part of a revised protocol. It was noted that this information would not necessarily need to be peer-reviewed literature (i.e. a 'gold standard') and there was a need to be flexible to use the various sources of available information.

Ms Goldsworthy suggested that a template would assist in providing a standard approach to protected area proposals. Such a template would ensure a consistent structure and level of detail across the various proposals. The idea of a template for proposals was discussed later in the meeting, and a draft template is included in this record.

There was a discussion around the importance of clearly articulating whether proposals contained any specific restrictions in certain areas (e.g. gear, depth, seasons etc.) and it was noted that the inclusion of this intent is crucial for assessing proposed areas.

Australian fishing industry (Austral) thanked Ms Goldsworthy for her comprehensive review and noted the difficulty of such a task given the limited information available. In relation to the challenge of providing information to support the rationale for proposals in what is generally a data and information-limited space, Austral noted that it would be happy to assist with skipper statements/affidavits and that they thought SIODFA would also be happy to assist.

³ Bioregional representation

- a. Area is known to contain unique, rare or distinct habitats or ecosystems that fishing operations will disturb and that are deemed to be desirable and acceptable.
- b. Area is known to contain unique, rare or distinct, habitats or ecosystems that bottom fishing operations will disturb.
- c. Area with a comparatively higher degree of naturalness because of the lack of or low level of human-induced disturbance or degradation, as an example considering historical fishing activities.

Austral supported the idea of a template for proposing areas. It was suggested that a strategy to put forward SIODFA-proposed protected areas that have adequate information might be a good place to begin, and that these could be used to test the proposed template.

IUCN noted that research is currently underway on the Walters Shoal and other seamounts, with research due to conclude this year. The research has included a review of the geomorphological characteristics of seamounts in the region. It was suggested that some of the results may be useful to support protected area proposal and designation. IUCN also concurred with the importance of understanding historical fishing and how this contributes to informing social, economic and cultural criteria. IUCN also reiterated the importance of articulating the intent of proposed protected areas in terms of whether these areas would prohibit all fishing or restrict certain fishing activities. It was agreed that IUCN's research in the SIOFA area would be helpful for informing SIOFA's work.

Korea queried whether there may be a need to collect and analyse more information before specific areas are formally proposed and/or designated. In response, the Chair noted that a key challenge in the region is the lack of availability of many different types of data, including biological, fishing and biophysical data, and that elements of these various considerations are required to make transparent and defensible decisions. He noted that the absence of all of the best information should not necessarily be used as a reason against designating certain areas. With this in mind, the Chair suggested that viewing the current proposals as 'interim protected areas' (if designated) was potentially useful, with regular review on the basis of new information.

The Chair queried whether additional guidance is needed as to the types of information and data that should be included in proposals. It was agreed that this would be useful. It was also noted that arrangements in other RFMOs and elsewhere could be drawn on. Korea noted the difficulty in collating all of the necessary information and agreed that other RFMOs or organisations (for example, CCAMLR and SEAFO) could provide useful experiences or examples of where this has been attempted in the past.

In relation to ground-truthing statements made in proposals for protected areas, Austral noted that recent technological advancements (for example, cameras on bottom fishing gears) were becoming cheaper and more reliable. The Chair agreed that this was a good idea and noted that the idea of interim protected areas should be supported by a commitment to the collection of more data to engender an ethos of 'continual improvement'.

6. Template for submission of BPA/fishery closed area proposals (Australia)

It was agreed that a draft template would be sent around for comment with the meeting record. The draft template is included below:

Name	<i>This field will contain the name of the proposed protected area</i>
Geographic area and other maps	<i>This field should contain the coordinates of the proposed area's spatial boundaries. It may also contain maps showing the spatial area and/or bathymetry, or other spatial information of relevance to the proposal</i>
General and specific objectives	<i>This field would include the primary reason/s for protection, structured against the criteria in the agreed SIOFA Standard Protocol for future protected areas designation. This section should include an indication of the protocol criteria that the proposed area meets, and any specific details. These details may include, but are not limited to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Information from scientific or other surveys</i> - <i>References to peer-reviewed literature</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Photographs, graphs and figures supporting the proposal</i> - <i>Fishing data analysis to support the proposal</i> - <i>Reports from skippers or observers to justify the proposal.</i>
Social, cultural and economic interests	<i>This section would consider existing fisheries interests and possible adverse impacts of protected area designation on those interests. This section should also consider potential future interests. Any social or cultural interests or values should also be included. This section should be backed up by data, formal statements and references in the literature.</i>
Proposed activities to be restricted or prohibited	<i>This section should contain detailed information on the scope of the protected area designation in terms of what activities would be restricted or prohibited. If the proposal is that some activities are restricted, this section should contain information on how these activities will be monitored.</i>
Review periods	<i>This section should contain an anticipated review period to review whether the protected area is achieving its objectives, including consideration of whether any new information has become available that may enhance or degrade the justification for protection.</i>
Outline of monitoring and/or research needed	<i>This section will contain an outline of monitoring and/or research needed to maintain, update or review the protected area.</i>
Compliance	<i>This section should consider any compliance-related issues relating to the proposed protected area, including whether specific compliance regulations or rules will apply to activities that are restricted or prohibited</i>

7. Formulation of next steps/advice (all)

The Chair asked when the final consultant's report would be available and it was agreed that by the end of November would be possible. Australia intends to then draft a working paper focusing on review of the protocol and criteria, which will include details of possible amendments. Some of these possible amendments were raised during the meeting, and others have been provided via email. It was noted that SIODFA's comments (provided via email) would be very helpful in developing this paper and SIODFA was thanked for this contribution.

The Chair noted the intent to circulate an outline of the working paper to the group in order to facilitate efficiency at SC3. The plan is to circulate a draft paper in early- to mid-December, ask for comments by late December and then submit to the Secretariat in line with normal protocols (mid February). This plan was supported by the group. The Chair would also extend an invitation to comment on this paper to those who were unable to attend the meeting.

The Chair queried whether it was possible to propose any of the SIODFA-proposed protected areas for designation. It was noted that there were four proposed protected areas that were thought to meet the protocol and criteria that could be put forward for proposal (see recommendations in Ms Goldsworthy's draft review). One of these (Walters Shoal) was in the area of the recent IUCN research. It was agreed that some additional detail would be useful in taking these forward for formal proposal and potential designation.

Austral expressed support for proposals for the four areas being submitted and noted the importance of getting some closures agreed.

IUCN noted that it would be happy to work with Australia/Ms Goldsworthy in providing any additional data to further improve the proposals. It was also noted that there were several other

areas that were close to meeting the protocol and SIODFA was encouraged to continue to strengthen the case for their proposal.

The Chair agreed to contact those not in attendance about the four proposed areas and acknowledged that this may lead to some additional work in terms of reviewing these areas.

8. Next meeting (Chair/all)

The Chair queried if another meeting was required or whether work could be progressed work via written correspondence. The latter was preferred but this could be revisited at a later date.

9. Other business

No other business was raised.

10. Meeting close

The meeting was closed at 7.00PM AEDT.

Annex 1 - Attendees

Simon Nicol (Australia)

Lee Georgeson (Australia)

Kerrie Robertson (Australia)

Rhys Arangio (Austral Fisheries)

Lyn Goldsworthy (Consultant)

Francois Simard (IUCN)

Eunjung Kim (Korea)

Seok-Gwan Choi (Korea)

Jon Lansley (SIOFA Secretariat)