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**SC-10-27**

# Status of progress towards establishing and operating a SIOFA observer program

The SIOFA Scientific Committee Chair

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<b>Abstract</b>	
This paper presents a summary the SC and MoP comments and recommendations on status of progress towards establishing and operating a SIOFA observer programme.	

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### Recommendations

The SIOFA SC Chair recommends that the SC10:

- **Considers** the status of progress towards establishing and operating a SIOFA observer programme.
- **Recommends** to the MoP options for further progress establishing and operating a SIOFA observer programme.

# Status of progress towards establishing and operating a SIOFA observer program

## 1. Introduction

In 2024, the SC noted the recommendation from the 2024 Workshop on the Harmonisation of Scientific Observers (WS2024-OBS report paragraph 52) and requested the SC Chairs and the Secretariat to present a document describing the status of progress towards establishing and operating a SIOFA observer programme and outstanding issues at SC10 (SC9 report, paragraph 368).

This paper summarizes the reports of the Scientific Committee and SC workshops from 2021 to 2024, as well as MoP agreements on the harmonisation of scientific observers in the SIOFA Area.

## 2. Summary of recommendations from the Scientific Committee and MoP

### 2.1 Summary of reports and recommendations from 2021-2022

In 2021, the Scientific Committee held a Workshop on Harmonisation of Scientific Observers' Programmes of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (WHSOP, and paper SC-07-INFO-07) in October 2021. This report summarised:

1. Harmonising CCPs scientific observer programmes
  - a. Documentation supplied to observers by CCPs for their respective Observer Programmes
  - b. Training procedures used by CCPs for their respective Observer Programmes
  - c. Monitoring of VMEs
  - d. Post-trip evaluation, data submission, and review
2. Development of an evaluation process for scientific observer programmes to improve data quality
  - a. CCP observer programme infrastructure
  - b. Training of observers
  - c. Post trip evaluation, data submission, and review
3. Developments on the use of e-monitoring to support scientific observation
  - a. E-monitoring standards
  - b. Data collection, storage, and security

The WHSOP recommendations to the SC that were summarised in Appendix D of that report.

Following WHSOP, a paper as requested by the WHSOP was developed by the SC Chair and WSHOP Convener on the development of a SIOFA Observer code of conduct, including requirements for independence, managing conflicts of interest, and health and safety considerations for Scientific Observers (paper SC-07-INFO-08) and was presented to SC7 and MoP9.

In 2022, these were considered by SC (SC7 report, paragraphs 208-224). SC7 made the following recommendations:

1. Request the MoP to:
  - a. Task the SC Chair and the Secretariat to undertake intersessional discussions with CCPs on SC and MoP on a potential code of conduct that specifies Scientific Observer, CCPs, and vessel responsibilities under a SIOFA Code of Conduct, including requirements for independence, managing conflicts of interest, and health and safety considerations for Scientific Observers.
  - b. Task the SC Chair to prepare, based on the intersessional discussions, a draft paper with options for a SIOFA Scientific Observer Code of Conduct to be considered by the SC and MoP in 2023.
2. Agreed the Workplan on the harmonisation of scientific observers' programmes as detailed in the WHSOP.
3. Endorsed the recommendation to support the Secretariat on the implementation of the Workplan by hiring a consultant.

In 2022, the MoP endorsed the request regarding the development of a SIOFA Observer Code of Conduct (MoP9 report, paragraph 99) and agreed that that it would apply to scientific observer duties and not any compliance-related duties, which would fall within the remit of the Compliance Committee (MoP report, paragraph 100).

MoP also endorsed the recommendation regarding the harmonisation of scientific observers' Programmes on the SC Workplan on the harmonisation of scientific observers' programmes as detailed in the WHSOP and the recommendation to support the Secretariat on the implementation of the Workplan by hiring a consultant (MoP9 report, paragraph 101).

## 2.2 Summary of reports and recommendations from 2022-2023

In 2023, the SC discussed the Observer framework harmonisation (SC8 report, paragraphs 306-313), but made no specific recommendations.

The project for the establishment of a framework for scientific observation of SIOFA fisheries (SEC2022-OBS1) was developed and funded by the EU under the SIOFA-SEAs project. The SC also agreed to discuss e-monitoring at a future meeting.

## 2.3 Summary of reports and recommendations from 2023-2024

In February 2024, the Workshop on the Harmonisation of Scientific Observers (WS2024-OBS) was held in February 2024 and its report presented to SC9 (paper SC-09-33). The workshop considered the recommendations arising from Project SEC2022-OBS1 (paper SC-09-INFO-20), comments on observer logbooks, and the draft CMM for an observer framework and the cruise report (paper SC-09-43).

SC9 considered observer harmonisation in paragraphs 329-376 of its report.

The SC recommended that:

345. The MoP note that a trial of the new forms for data submission would take place in the coming year. The SC would then consider the results of the trial at its next meeting before formulating its recommendations to the MoP on the adoption of the forms (SC9 report, paragraph 344) and CCPs trial the submission of their 2023 observer logbook data using the new forms (SC9 report, paragraph 345).

348. A Scientific Observer Form Workshop be held near the end of the 2024 calendar year to identify and resolve any issues with the new forms and the data submission process, and presented to SC10 (SC9 report, paragraph 348)
352. That the MoP note that a CMM on a SIOFA Observer Programme should include elements such as a Code of Conduct for an observer scheme, defined roles and responsibilities of observers, and categories of data that should be collected by observers (SC9 report, paragraph 352).
353. That the MoP note that specific sampling mechanisms and requirements could be defined in an observer manual that is developed by the SC. This approach would allow greater flexibility in setting and revising specific scientific sampling priorities (SC9 report, paragraph 353).
356. Endorsed the recommendation in paragraphs 32c of the WS-2024-OBS report and agreed to review the proposed CMM and the observer logbooks to ensure that they are aligned at the proposed Scientific Observer Form Workshop (SC9 report, paragraph 356).
357. Endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 39 of the WS-2024-OBS report and agreed to consider specific observer-related topics for its medium-term workplan (SC9 report, paragraph 357)
357. The SC endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 47 of the WS-2024-OBS report and agreed to discuss the potential future work identified by the SEC2022-OBS1 project, prioritizing the Scientific rather than the Structural list of projects, as part of its workplan (SC9 report, paragraph 357).
357. Endorsed the recommendations in paragraph 48 of the WS-2024-OBS report that a prioritization and tentative timeline (e.g., a staged process) of the projects would be beneficial in drafting a mid-term plan for the SC to address observer harmonisation and that the timeline for these projects would be on the scale of 2 years (SC9 report, paragraph 357).
360. Endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 49 of the WS-2024-OBS report that it will be important to keep this process of development as iterative, with periodic checks and reassessment, including on the timeline, to optimize the outcomes given the available resources (SC9 report, paragraph 360).
361. Endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 50 of the WS-2024-OBS report that the SC consider further work on developing an accreditation process for SIOFA (SC9 report, paragraph 361).
362. Encouraged CCPs to include information on the accreditation of their observers and/or observer programs in next year's National Reports to facilitate discussions on the SIOFA-level observer accreditation options (SC9 report, paragraph 362).
362. Noted that the establishment and operation of a SIOFA-level accreditation system would be beyond the current capacity of the Secretariat, and it would be worthwhile exploring the use of an accreditation agent. Noting the SC's already full workload, the SC agreed to defer further discussion of this topic to SC10 (SC9 report, paragraph 362).
365. Noted that, in line with the recommendation in paragraph 51 of the WS-2024-OBS report, it has considered the requirements for observer coverage in all its fisheries as part of its discussions at SC9. The SC noted the other recommendation in paragraph 51 that it should also consider the requirement for observer coverage for exploratory fisheries once the MoP progresses this topic (SC9 report, paragraph 365).
367. Recommended that the MoP consider mandatory and higher levels of observer coverage, noting that information on distribution and demography and potential impacts on non-target and associated or dependent species is reliant on observer information that is, in some fisheries, not available or very sparse (SC9 report, paragraph 366) and noted that 100% observer coverage should be considered (SC9 report, paragraph 367).
370. Endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 57 of the WS-2024-OBS report on the development of an Observer Code of Conduct. The SC noted that a proposal for an Observer Code of Conduct would need to be progressed by a CCP to the MoP, and recommended that

the drafts in WS2024-OBS-01 and SC-07-INFO-08 be considered in the development of such a proposal (SC9 report, paragraph 370).

371. Noted that some observer logbook information could be collected using electronic monitoring (EM) systems but that this would require considerable post-processing and agreement on the analysis methods and standards to be used if implemented across the range of fisheries managed by SIOFA (SC9 report, paragraph 371).
372. Supported the development of EM processes, while noting that it is necessary to take into consideration various cost/effort trade-offs (SC9 report, paragraph 372) but did not recommend the replacement of observers with EM systems for new and exploratory fisheries (SC9 report, paragraph 372).

SC9 also developed a Framework and forms for exploratory fisheries (SC9 report, Annex G).

The SC identified that there be a focus session on Scientific Observers at SC10.

MoP10 discussed the Observer harmonisation work of the SC in paragraphs 90-94 of its report. In addition, MoP10 noted the recommendation in paragraph 88 of the SC9 report and noted that while the submission of observer data is not a requirement for pelagic fisheries, it would be valuable to have this information available in the SIOFA databases.

The MoP noted:

90. that a voluntary trial of the new forms for data submission would take place in the coming year and that the SC would then consider the results of the trial at its next meeting before formulating its recommendations to the MoP on the adoption of the forms (MoP10 report, paragraph 90).
91. The recommendation in paragraph 352 of the SC9 report and that a CMM on a SIOFA Observer Programme should include elements such as a Code of Conduct for an observer scheme, defined roles and responsibilities of observers, and categories of data that should be collected by observers (MoP10 report, paragraph 91).
90. That specific sampling mechanisms and requirements could be defined in an observer manual that is developed by the SC and that this approach would allow greater flexibility in setting and revising specific scientific sampling priorities (MoP10 report, paragraph 90).
93. That the SC recommended that the MoP consider mandatory and higher levels of observer coverage. The MoP tasked SC10 to provide advice to MoP12 on observer coverage levels by unit of effort and data collection requirements for observers on all fisheries, as well as observer data submission requirements for SIOFA (MoP10 report, paragraph 93).

In November 2024, the Workshop on Scientific Observer Forms (WS2024-OBS2) was held. WS2024-OBS2 made the following recommendations to be considered by SC10:

13. Regarding the instruction provided to fill the forms, the Workshop recommended that the SC considers recommending that future development of the observer logbooks consider including a short form of help within the logbook spreadsheets, e.g. using the “cell comment” function in Excel, in addition to external instructions and the observer manual (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 13).
14. Regarding the lack of dropdown fields to facilitate data entry and prevent errors, the Workshop recommended that the SC considers encouraging the use of dropdown fields as much as possible in the forms during their future development (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 14).
15. Regarding the trips that span across calendar years, the Workshop noted that there are different solutions available and recommended that this could be dealt with at the Secretariat level rather than with a change in the forms (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 15).

20. On the utility of reporting longline branchline information, the Workshop requested the SC further considers whether it is useful to maintain it in the observer forms (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 20).
21. That the SC further considers if the use and makeup of additional bycatch mitigation gear should be recorded, e.g. mammal exclusion devices (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 21).
22. That the SC further considers whether additional information should be provided to describe details of escape ports in the pot fishery forms, both within the observer forms and as part of an instruction manual (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 22).
23. That the SC further considers how observer could best record effort in handline fisheries (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 23).
24. That the SC further considers the possibility of recording more detailed information on the severity of seabird warp strikes, and cross checks with ACAP recommendations on this subject (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 24).
25. The Workshop recommended that the SC further considers the possibility of observers recording marine mammal depredation, as a fishery-independent measure of what recorded in catch-effort logbooks (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 25).
26. That the SC further develops a list of Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) species, and ensure that this list is provided within observer manuals and ETP observer logbook forms. The SC should also consider that ETP species might end up being reported in more than one observer form (e.g. mammals and seabirds captures) and should develop a way forward to avoid double reporting (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 26).
27. That the SC further advises on the best unit of measure for observers to record the weight of gonads (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 27).
28. That the SC further considers the list of changes proposed to observer logbooks detailed in WS2024-OBS2-03-Rev1 and included in Annex B of this report (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 28).
29. That the SC further considers the best approach to reflect these changes in observer logbooks in the SIOFA regulatory framework. These could be reflected as an amendment of CMM 02, as a new standalone observer CMM or perhaps a specification of CMM 02 at a different regulation level (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 29).
30. That the SC considers further improvements to the observer logbooks, including introducing field validation routines and locking cells with the aim to reduce input errors (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 30).
35. That the SC further considers whether the creation of a training manual alongside the data collection manual constitutes duplication or is necessary (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 35).
36. That further discussion on this project and recommended that the SC further develops the draft project description and adds it to its workplan (WS2024-OBS2, paragraph 36).