

9th Meeting of the Compliance Committee (CC9) and 12th Meeting of the Parties (MoP12)

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Implementing Area Protection

Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

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Abstract	
<p>The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) welcomes the Scientific Committee's revisions to the <i>Standard Protocol for future protected areas designation</i> and its endorsement of several benthic areas for protection. We urge the Meeting of the Parties to adopt both the revised Protocol (SC-SC-10, Annex G) and the protected areas (MoP-12-38 rev1) as an initial step towards implementing a system of area protection. That step, alongside mapping and protection of VMEs, including seamounts, will help prepare SIOFA for the ratification of the BBNJ Agreement). DSCC has provided several suggestions to progress this work.</p>	

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² Documents available only to members invited to closed sessions.

Implementing Area Protection

Introduction

The DSCC welcomes the work undertaken by the SC to revise the Standard Protocol for future protected areas designation and its endorsement of several benthic areas for protection. This builds on the significant work undertaken within SIOFA to develop mechanisms to identify and manage vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). These efforts have included bioregional mapping, systematic planning using Marxan, biodiversity modelling based on VME indicator taxa, consideration of criteria for identifying significant adverse impacts, and assessment of significant adverse impacts from fishing activities.

We urge the Meeting of the Parties to adopt both the revised Protocol (SC-SC-10, Annex G), in line with prior practice (MoP-04 (2017), para 12.b; MoP-05 (2018), para 40), and the proposed CMMs for the protected areas articulated in MoP-12-38 rev1. This would be an essential first step in implementing the Protocol and preparing for the ratification of the BBNJ Agreement. (The Agreement currently has 50 ratifications and needs just 10 more to come into force).

The revised Protocol lists six criteria upon which to evaluate proposed areas. These include areas of known VME occurrence and/or where VME indicator thresholds have been triggered, for bioregional, geographic and/or geomorphological or biodiversity representation, of scientific interest, and areas of special significance for endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species or important species or ecosystem properties. These evaluation criteria are consistent with the requirements of the BBNJ Agreement and reinforce international conservation commitments.

The proposed protected areas endorsed by the SC meet Criteria 1, and encompass the five existing interim benthic protected areas, and additional areas voluntarily applied by SIODFA Members.

DSCC proposes that the MoP:

- **Adopt the Protocol** and record this decision in the Meeting Report (as per previous versions);
- **Publish the Protocol** on the SIOFA website for accessibility and transparency;
- **Recognise the Protocol as a 'living document'**, and encourage Members to propose further MPA proposals in alignment with its criteria;
- **Direct the Scientific Committee** to include the Protocol in its work plan, focusing initially on:
 - Providing advice on information required to progress the submission of further MPAs under the Protocol,
 - Identifying potential priority areas for protection,
 - Progressing the agreed focused session to discuss techniques for improved mapping and recording of VMEs (SC-9, para 302), and include in that session a case-by-case assessment of seamounts as VMEs under existing protocols/criteria to better inform:
 - Management of seamounts as VMEs, and
 - The submission of further MPAs under this criteria

- **Acknowledge that new MPA proposals** will contribute to SIOFA's efforts to be 'BBNJ' ready;
- **Include the role of the Protocol** in discussions around becoming 'BBNJ ready';
- **Agree to review** the implementation of the Protocol by 2030;
- **Consider the role of MPAs** when developing response actions to climate change impacts;
- **Adopt the proposed CMMs** for the 12 Protected Area proposals as a progress marker in SIOFA's implementation of UNGA resolutions to protect seamounts and other VMEs from the impacts of destructive practices like bottom trawling;
- **Establish a standardised** review period for designated protected areas;
- **Direct the SC** to provide advice on effective mechanisms for monitoring designated protected areas.

DSCC believes that these proposals will strengthen SIOFA's conservation framework and align its strategies with global commitments to protect deep-sea biodiversity.