MOP-12-INFO-06

SIOFA benthic protected area short summaries

Australia, Cook Islands, Japan and SIODFA

Meeting	Compliance Committee ☐
	Meeting of the Parties ✔
Document type	working paper ☐
	information paper ✔
Distribution	Public ✔
	Restricted [1] ☐
	Closed session document [2] ☐
Abstract	

This document is intended to provide a brief summary of the proposed benthic protected areas (BPAs) for MoP12. For each of the proposed BPAs, we provide a map and topography, brief description of the objectives of the BPA, the risks to the area, the SC10 evaluation criteria that were met, the characteristics of the area, other critical information, the SC10 recommendations and the review period recommended by SC10.

These 1-page summaries should not be considered a comprehensive information package. The complete information pack for each BPA is contained within WS2024-PAD-ADM-02.

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[2] Documents available only to members invited to closed sessions.

Introduction

This document is intended to provide a brief summary of the proposed BPAs for MoP12. Figure 1 provides a map showing the location of the BPAs within the SIOFA Agreement Area. Figures 2 to Figure 13 then provide, the features topography and a cross section through part of the area. A brief description of the objectives of the BPA, the risks to the area, the SC10 evaluation criteria that were met, the characteristics of the area, other critical information, the SC10 recommendations and the review period recommended by SC10.

These summaries should not be considered as having a comprehensive information package, the complete information pack for each BPA is contained within WS2024-PAD-ADM-02 and the associated references within that document.

Note: For the purposes of this document "Bottom fishing" is defined as per CMM 01 (2023) paragraph 3b.

The **SIOFA Standard protocol for future protected areas designation** criteria were used for evaluating the BPA proposals.
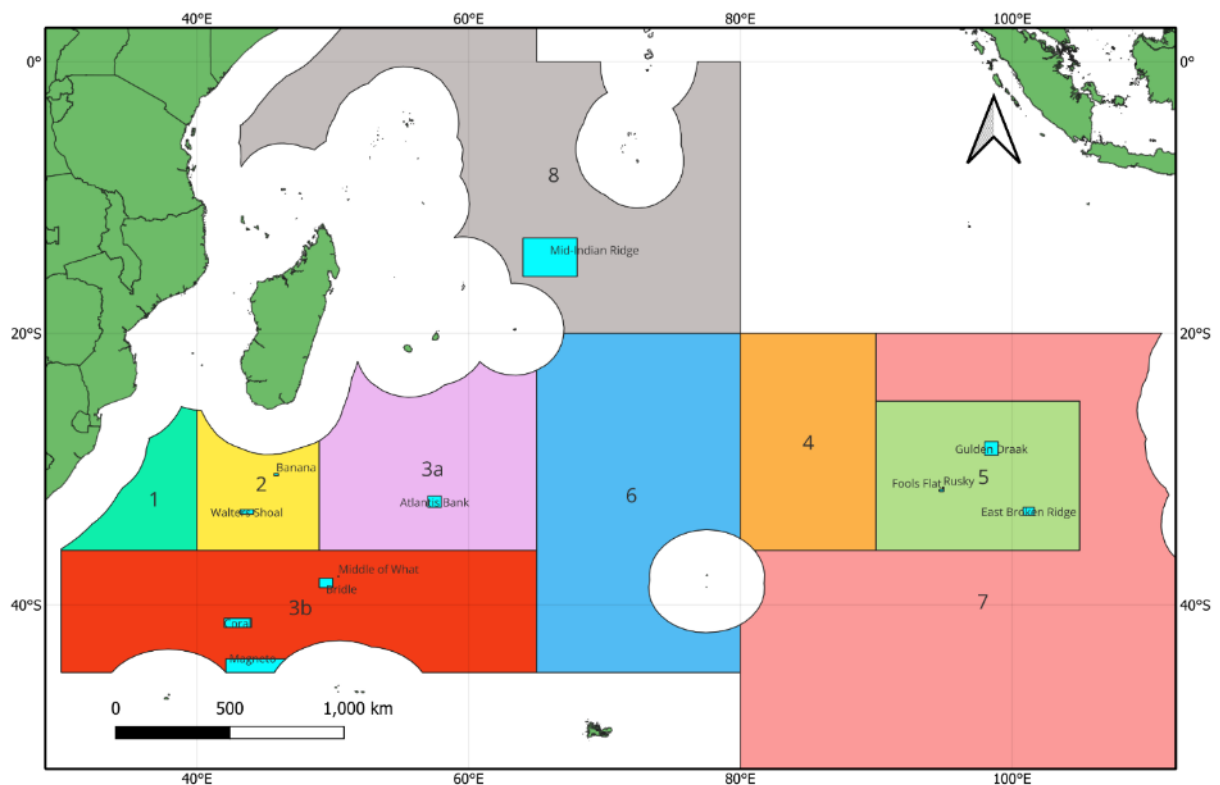

Figure 1: Locations of the areas recommended by SC10 for consideration for Benthic Protected Area (BPA) designation at MoP12.

SIOFA evaluation criteria for future protected areas designation (SC10 report Annex G)

1. **VMEs are known to occur and/or triggering of VME indicator thresholds reported for the area proposed**
   a. Known or consistent triggering of VME indicator thresholds occur.
   b. VMEs have been observed through non-fishing operations.
2. **Bioregional representation**
   a. Area is known to contain unique, rare or distinct, habitats or ecosystems that fishing operations will disturb.
   b. Area with a comparatively higher degree of naturalness due to zero or a low level of human-induced disturbance or degradation from, for example, historical fishing activity.
3. **Geographic and/or geomorphological representation**
   a. The area provides for important or desirable geographic representation within the SIOFA area.
   b. The area proposed is known to contain unique or unusual geomorphological features that fishing operations may damage.
4. **Biodiversity representation**
   a. The area is known to contain unique or rare (occurring in only a few locations) species, populations or communities.
   b. The area is known to contain a high diversity of ecosystems, habitats, communities, or species, or has higher genetic diversity.
   c. The area is known to contain a relatively high proportion of sensitive habitats, biotopes or species that are functionally fragile (highly susceptible to degradation or depletion by human activity or by natural events) or with slow recovery.
5. **Scientific interest**
   a. The area has scientific research interest associated with understanding ecosystem, biological, geological and biodiversity processes in the SIOFA.
6. **Areas of special significance for endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species or important species or ecosystem properties**
   a. There is evidence that the area is of special importance for critical life history stages of ETP species.
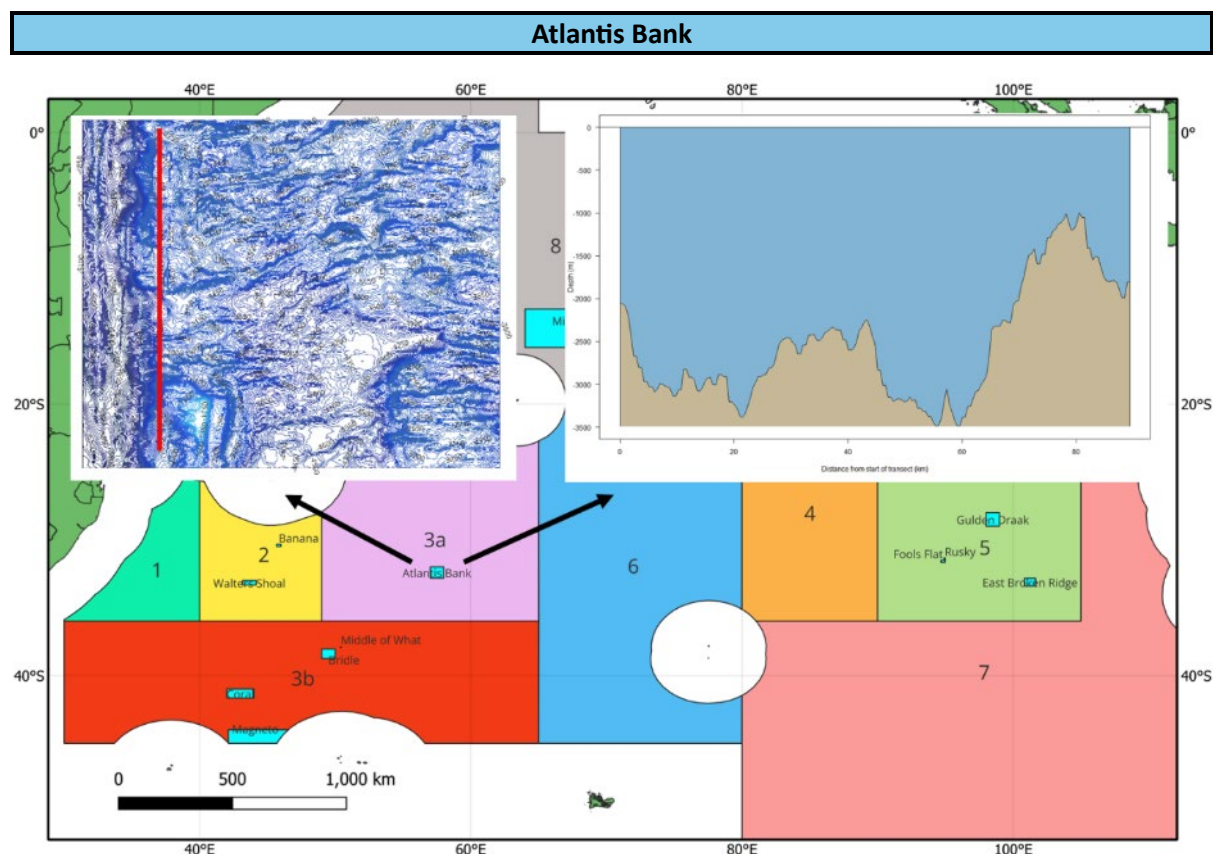
Atlantis Bank

Figure 2: Location of the Atlantis Bank BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (top right).

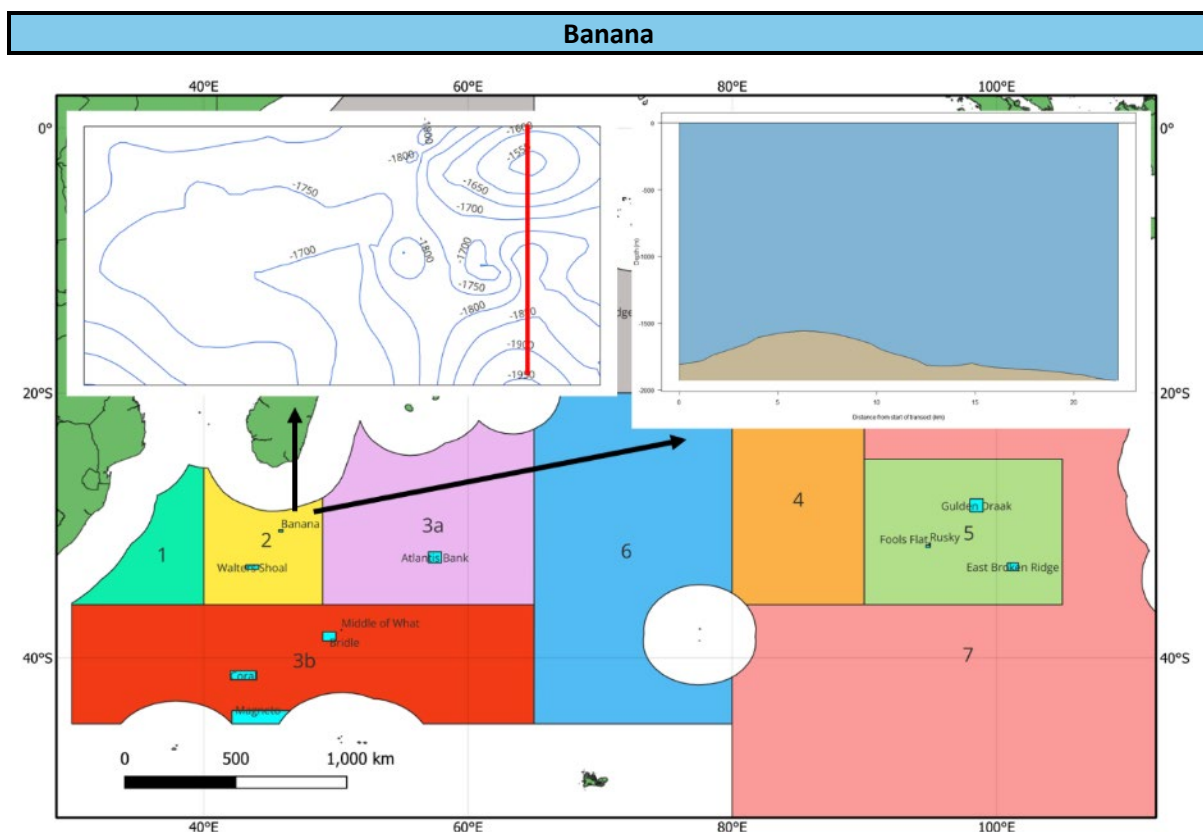| Risk	Fishing within this area with any bottom gear could detrimentally impact the biodiversity, damage VMEs and degrade the scientific interest of this area.
Objectives	• Protection of VMEs; • Protection of biodiversity; and • Protection of an area of special scientific interest.
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 3b, 4a and 6a
Characteristics	The presence of unique habitats such as complex sea-cliff deep-sea communities and VME indicator taxa such as coral gardens.
Other	The area is listed as an Ecologically or Biologically Significant Area (EBSA) and identified by UNESCO as a priority site of Outstanding Universal Value.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa and likely presence of endemic species.
Review period	10 years

Banana

Figure 3: Location of the Banana BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (top right).

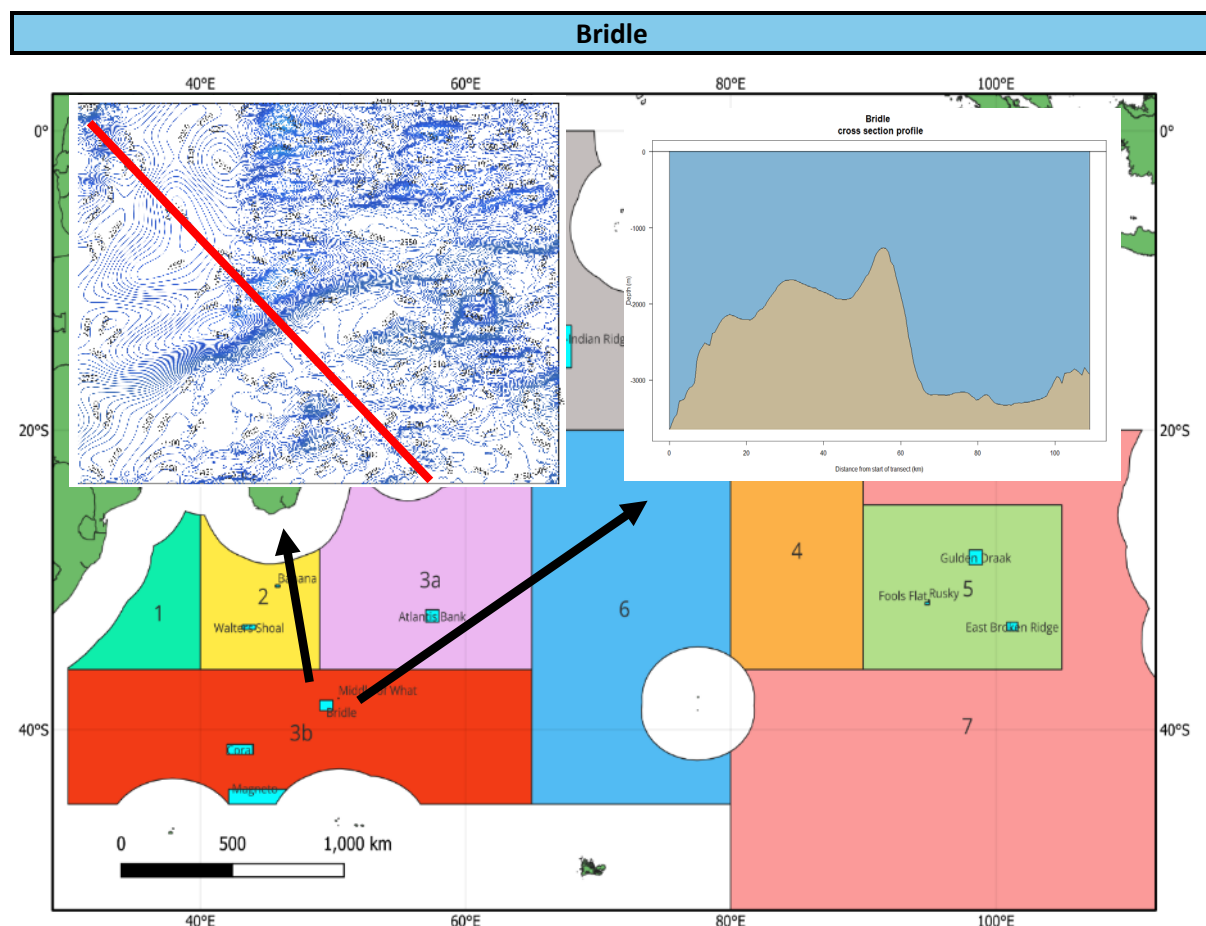| Risk	Fishing within this area with all bottom gear could detrimentally impact the biodiversity and VMEs.
Objectives	• Protection of its geographic and/or unique representation; • Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of threatened or important species or ecosystem
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 3a&b, and 6a
Characteristics	Unique habitat and thought to be a VME with important benthic faunal populations and communities including coral and deepwater elasmobranchs.
Other	
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa, and threatened or important species.
Review period	10 years

Bridle

Figure 4: Location of the Bridle BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (top right).

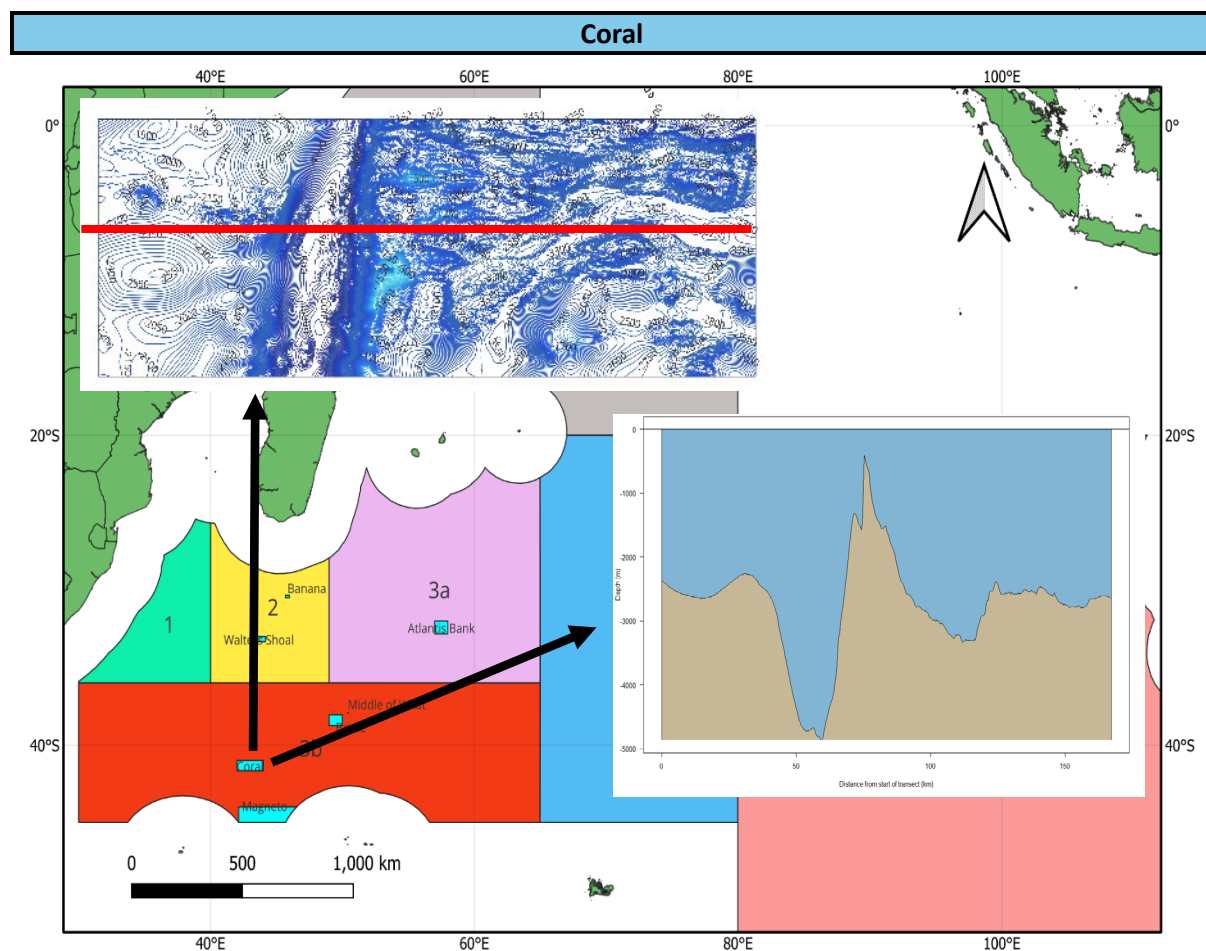| Risk	Fishing within this area with all bottom gear could detrimentally impact the biodiversity, VMEs and scientific interest of this area.
Objectives	• Protection of its geographic and/or unique representation; • Protection of potential VMEs; and • Protection of threatened or important species or ecosystems.
SC10 Criteria met	2a and 6a
Characteristics	Presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa such as brain corals and likely presence of endemic species.
Other	
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of unique habitats and VME indicator taxa.
Review period	10 years

Figure 5: Location of the Coral BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (bottom right).

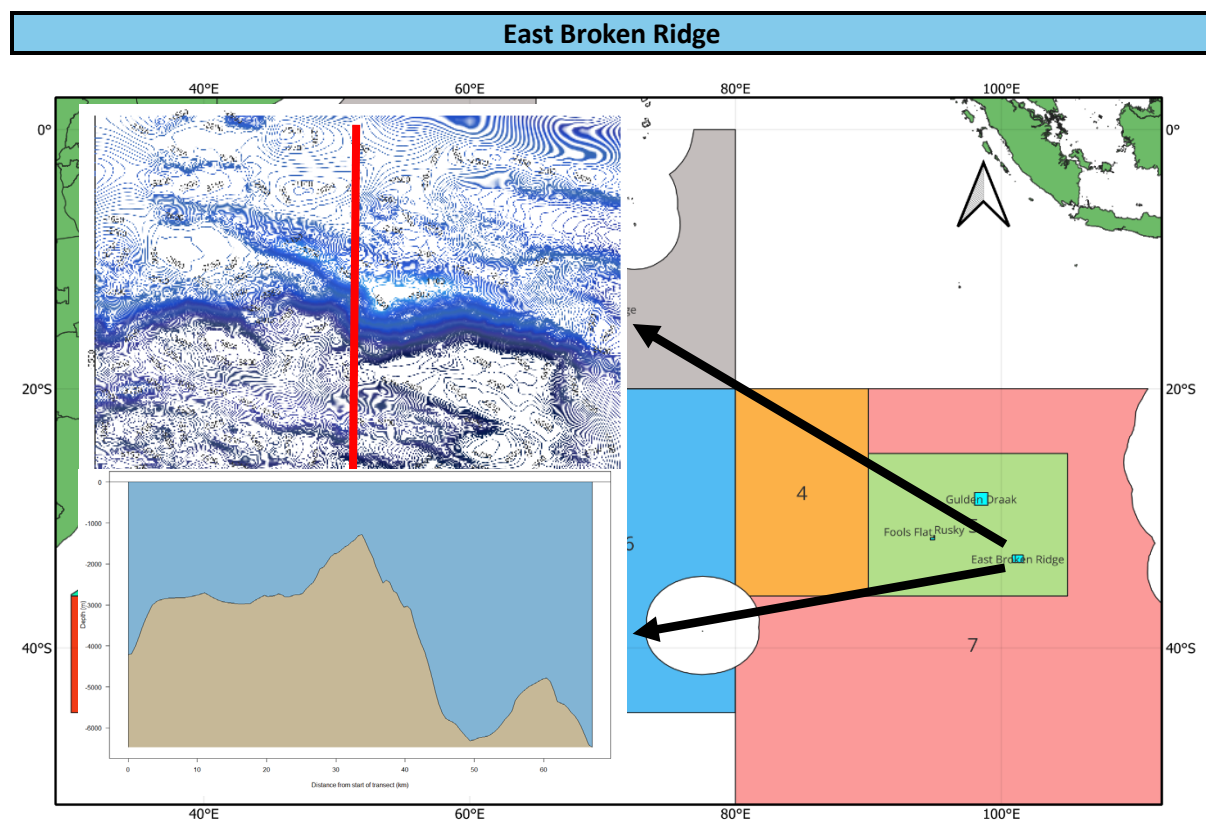| Risk	Bottom trawl fishing within this proposed area could detrimentally impact the biodiversity and damage VMEs
Objectives	• Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of its bioregional representativeness; • Protection of biodiversity; and • Protection of an area of special scientific interest
SC10 Criteria met	1a&b, 2b, 4b, and 5a
Characteristics	Presence of unique habitats such as coral gardens, VME indicator taxa cold water corals, and endemic species including two endemic species of hippolytid shrimps and the unique *Lophelia pertusa*.
Other	Listed as an EBSA. Fits the criteria of a Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem under the FAO Guidelines for Implementation of UNGA Resolution 61/105.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing, except bottom longlining, due to the presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa and endemic species
Review period	10 years

East Broken Ridge

Figure 6: Location of the East Broken Ridge BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (bottom left).

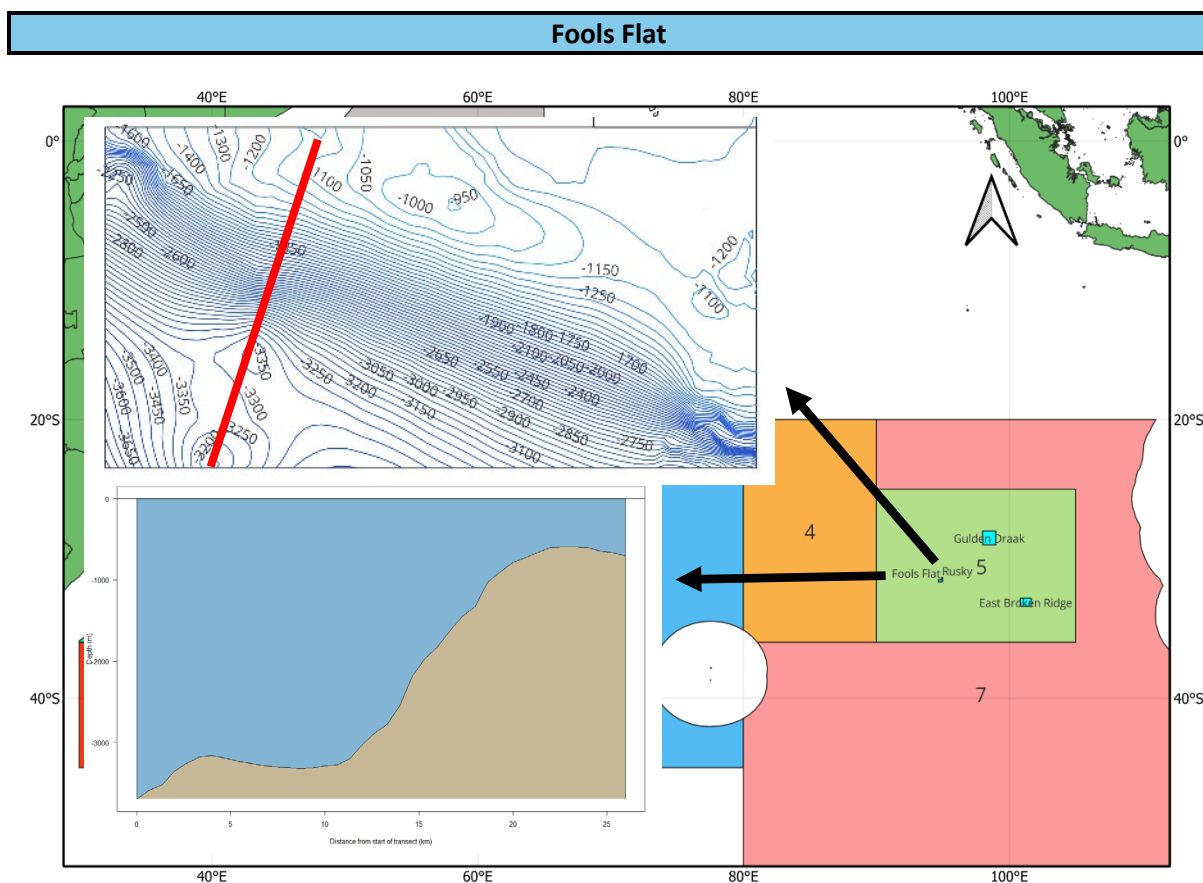|	
Risk	Fishing within this area with bottom gear could detrimentally impact the biodiversity, VMEs and scientific interest of this area.
Objectives	• Protection of its geographic and/or unique representation; and • Protection of VMEs
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 3a&b
Characteristics	Unique guyot containing the presence of VME indicator taxa including stands of brain and black coral.
Other	Listed as an EBSA.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of unique habitats and VME indicator taxa
Review period	10 years

Fools Flat

Figure 7: Location of the Fools Flat BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (bottom left).

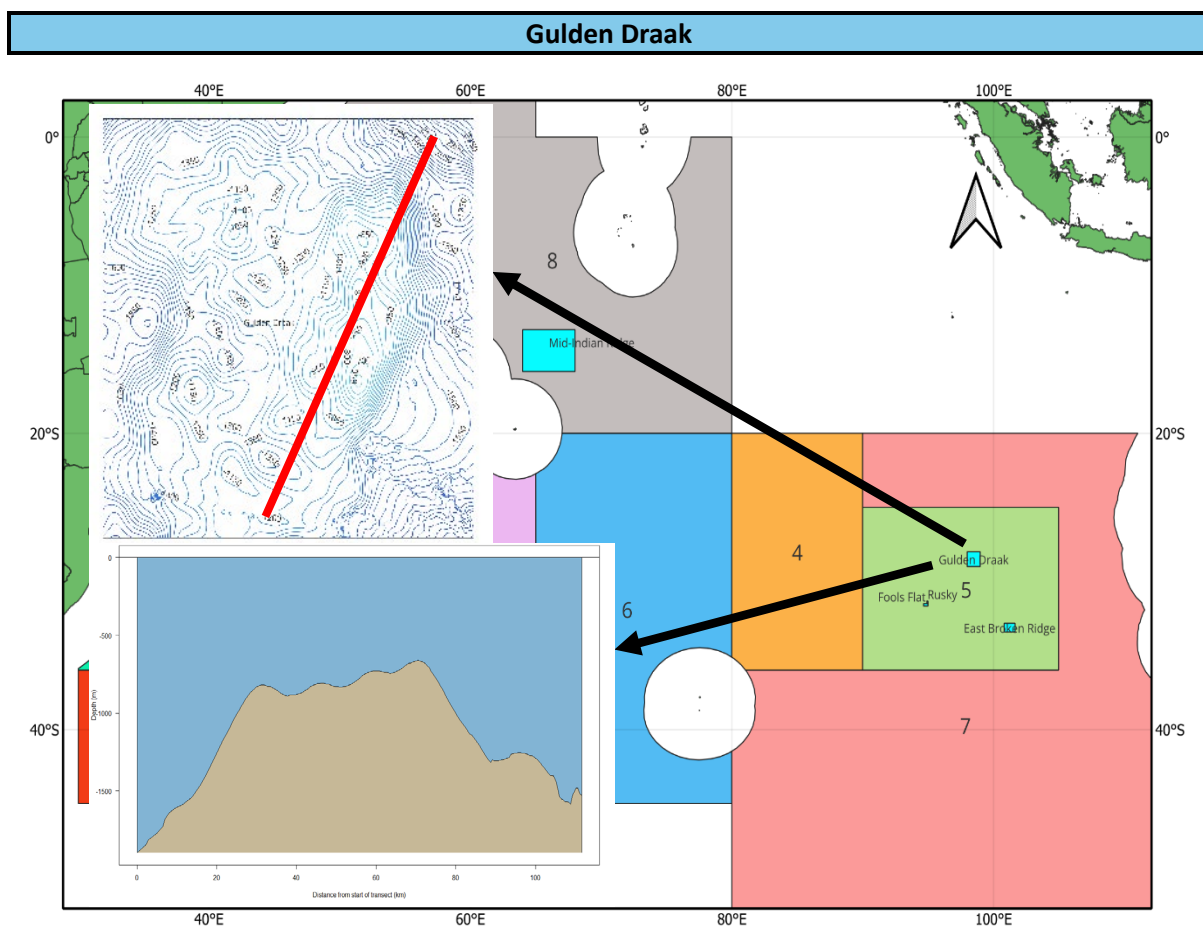| Risk	Fishing within this area with bottom gear could detrimentally impact the biodiversity and damage VMEs
Objectives	• Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of its bioregional representation; • Protection of its geographic and/or unique representation; • Protection of its biodiversity.
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 2b, 3a&b, and 4b
Characteristics	Presence of a wide range of unique benthic habitat types and VME indicator taxa including substantial coral reefs with the largest area of cold-water coral habitat yet identified in any ocean.
Other	Listed as an EBSA with a long period of closure to fishing.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of unique habitats and VME indicator taxa
Review period	10 years

Gulden Draak

Figure 8: Location of the Gulden Draak BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (bottom left).

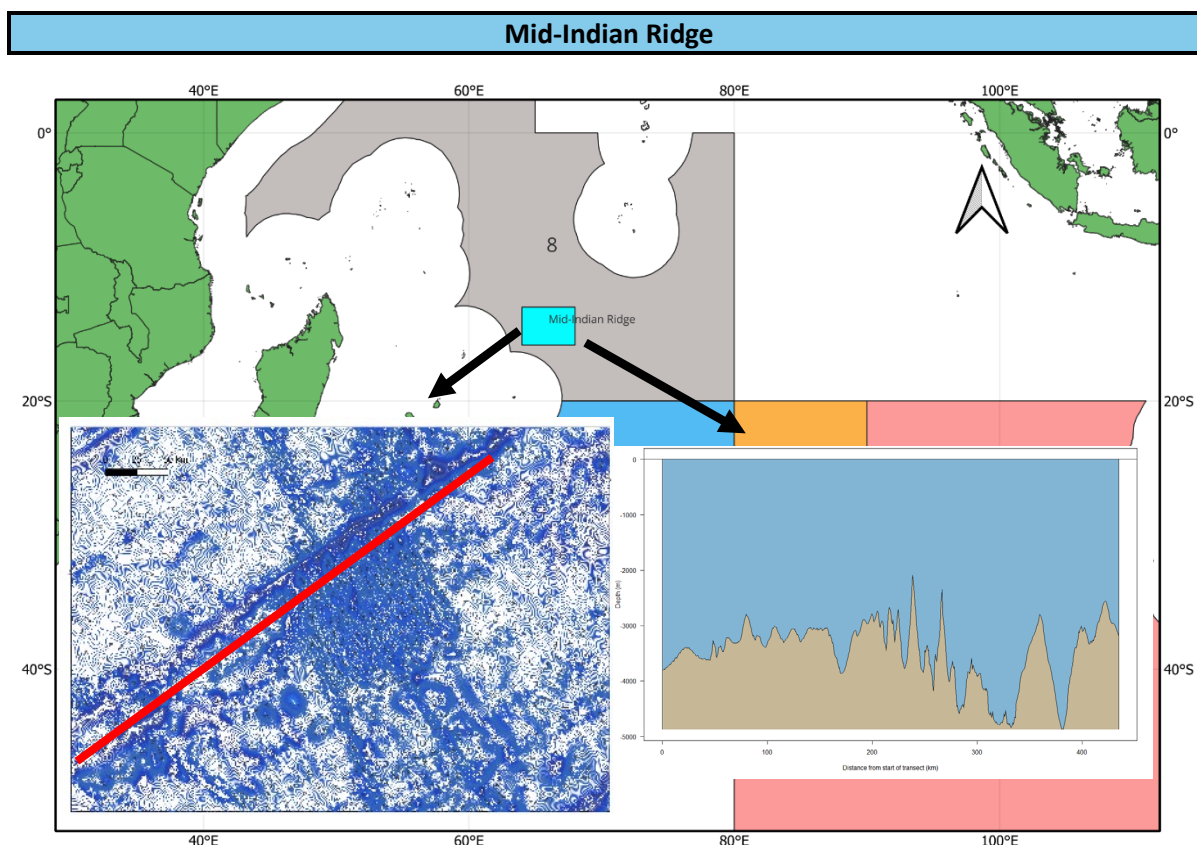|	
Risk	Fishing within this area with bottom gear could detrimentally impact the relatively pristine area, biodiversity and complex geological and geomorphological features of this area.
Objectives	• Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of its bioregional representativeness; and • Protection of its unique geological/geomorphological representativeness.
SC10 Criteria met	2b and 3a&b
Characteristics	Submarine rifted continental fragment with complex geological and geomorphological characteristics. Likely presence of VME indicator taxa potential unique habitats.
Other	
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the potential presence VME indicator taxa and sensitive geology
Review period	10 years

Mid-Indian Ridge

Figure 9: Location of the Mid-Indian Ridge BPA showing the topography (bottom left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (bottom right).

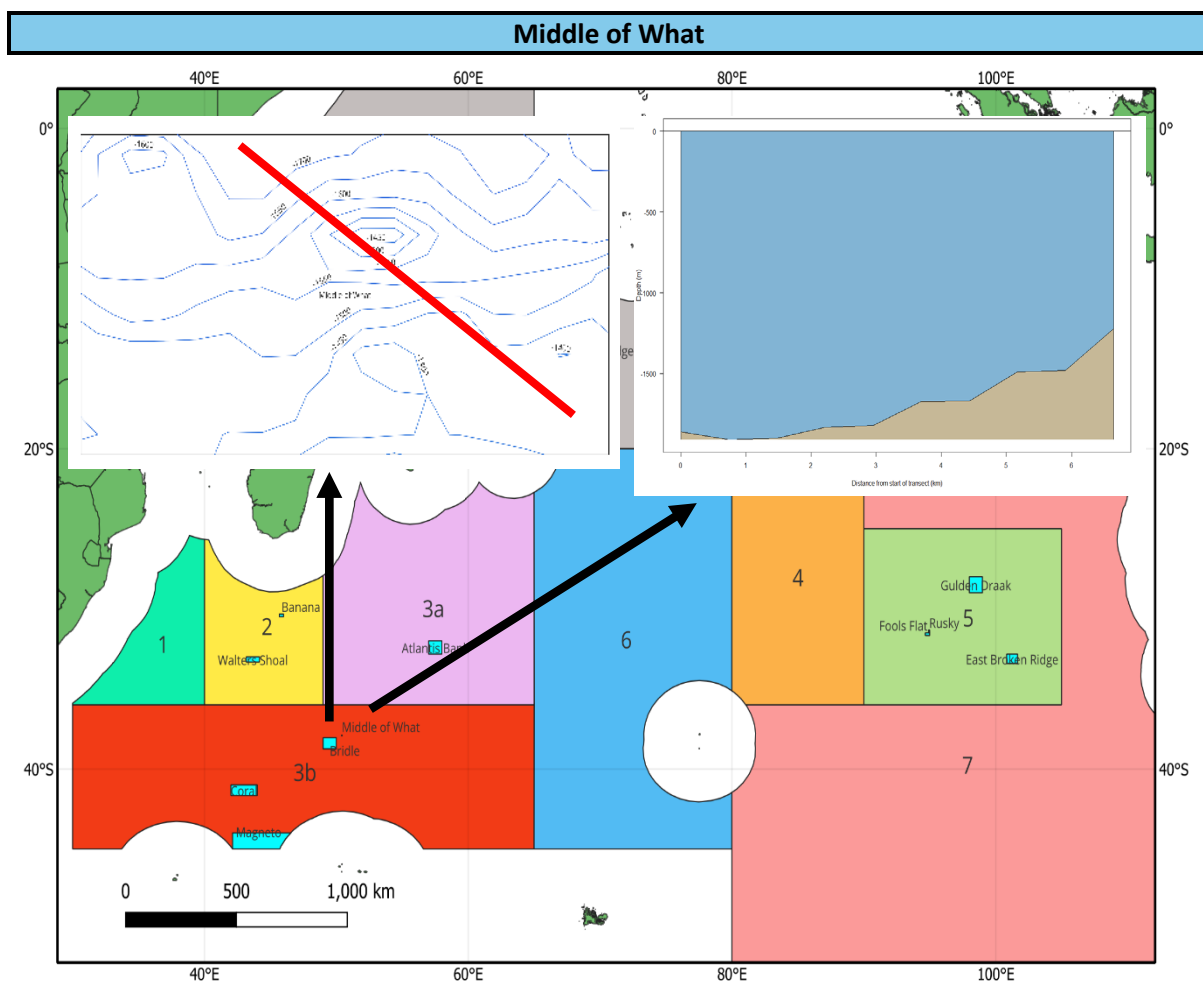|	
Risk	Fishing within this area with bottom gear could detrimentally impact the biodiversity and fragile geology and biology of this area.
Objectives	• Protection of its unique geographic representation; • Protection of its high degree of naturalness; and • Protection of potential VMEs.
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 2b and 3a&b
Characteristics	It is an area of a series of 990 seamounts rising to 650m. The area is assumed to be biologically pristine. Likely presence of VME indicator taxa including corals and potentially sensitive geological features.
Other	Likely never fished
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the potential presence VME indicator taxa and sensitive geology.
Review period	10 years

Middle of What

Figure 10: Location of the Middle of What BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (top right).

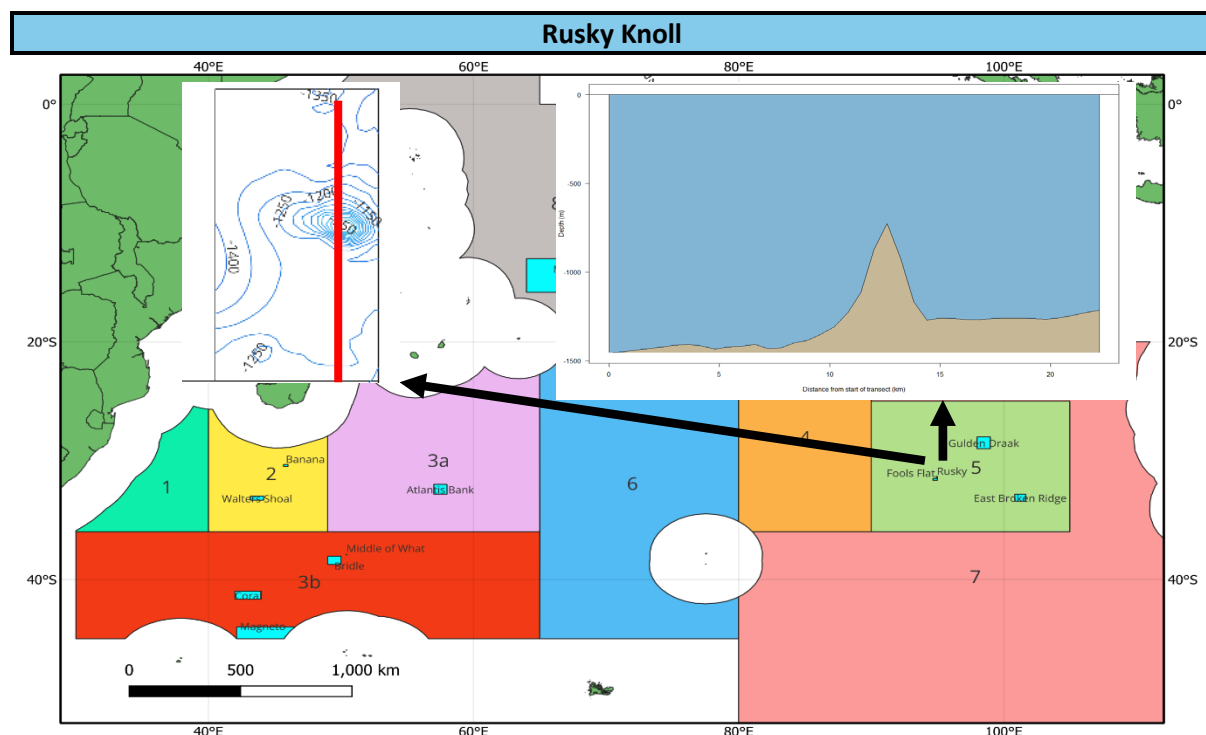| Risk	Fishing within this proposed area could detrimentally impact the representativeness of this area and degrade VMEs.
Objectives	• Protection of its bioregional representativeness; and • Protection of potential VMEs.
SC10 Criteria met	1a and 2a&b
Characteristics	Presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa including cold water and bamboo corals and glass sponges and endemic coral species (*Solenosmilia variabilis*), with high numbers of deepwater sharks present.
Other	Listed as an EBSA. Only known example of a seamount with cold-water coral reef habitat lying in the boundary region of sub-Antarctic and sub-tropical water masses. The cold water coral reef areas fit the criteria of a VME under the FAO Guidelines for Implementation of UNGA Resolution 61/105.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa and endemic species.
Review period	10 years

Figure 11: Location of the Rusky Knoll BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (top right).

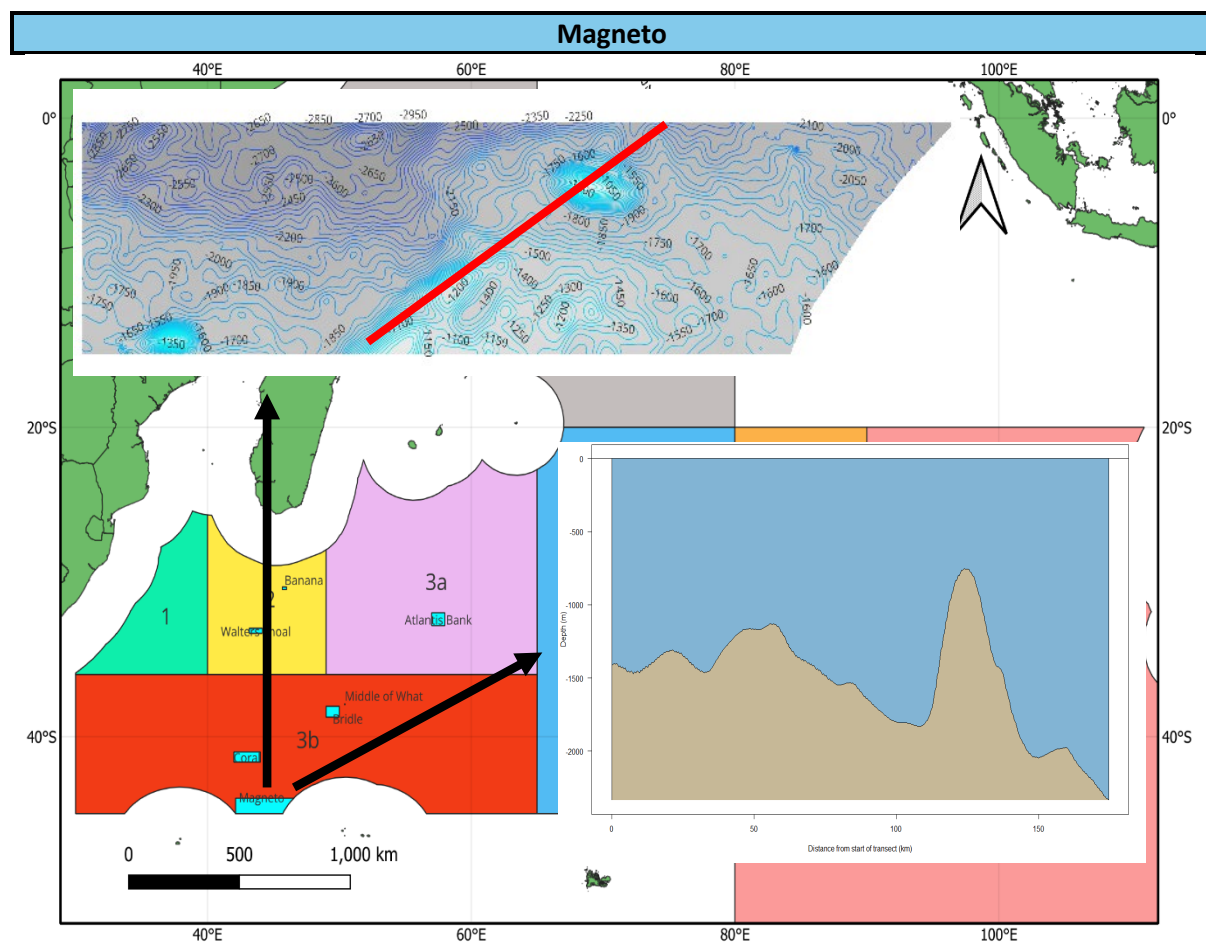|	
Risk	Fishing within this proposed area could detrimentally impact the representativeness of this area and damage VMEs.
Objectives	• Protection of its bioregional representativeness; • Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of threatened or important species or ecosystem; • Protection of areas important for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats.
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 2b and 6a
Characteristics	Presence of VME indicator taxa including coral gardens and potentially unique black coral habitats.
Other	Listed as an EBSA.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing due to the presence of threatened or important species or ecosystems, VME indicator taxa.
Review period	10 years

Figure 12: Location of the Magneto BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (bottom right).

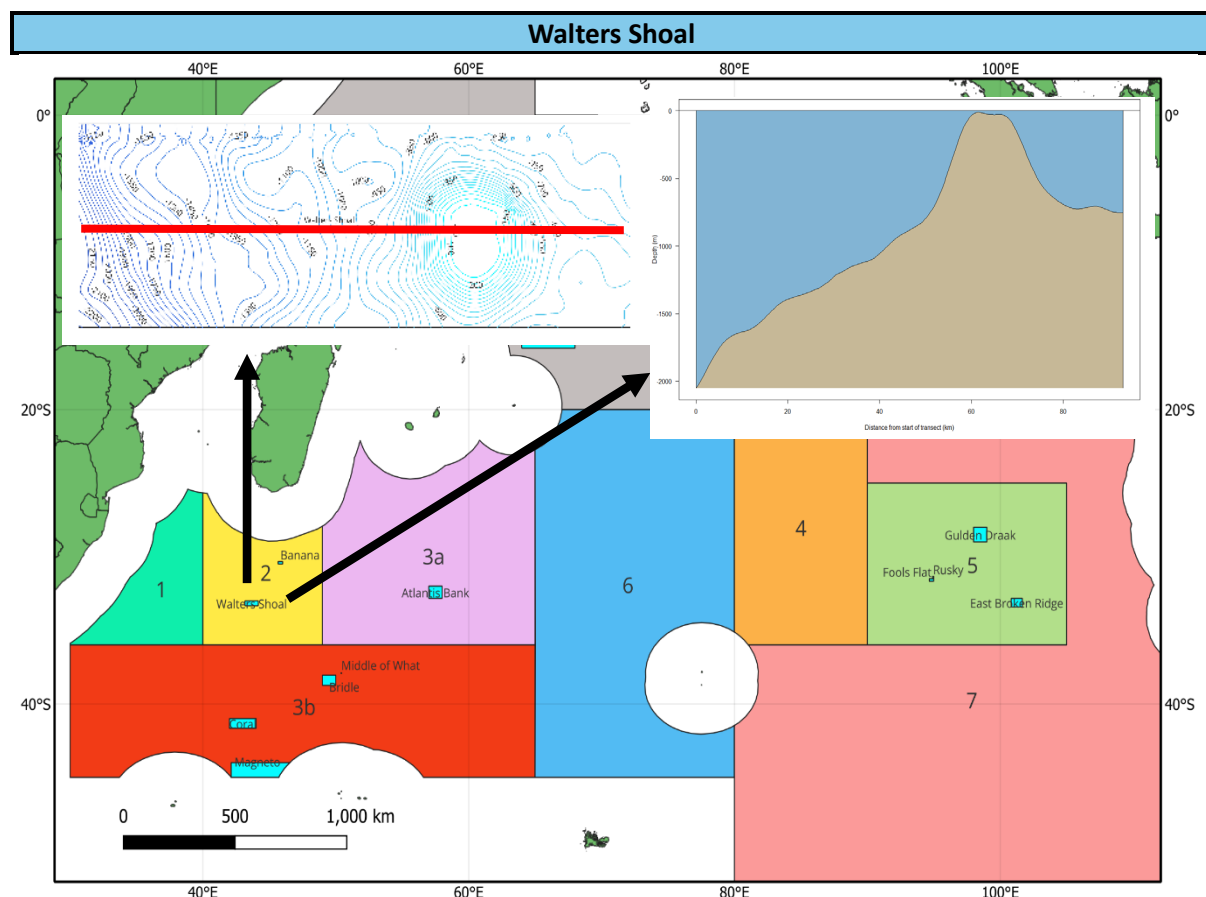| Risk	Bottom trawl fishing within this proposed area could detrimentally impact the biodiversity and damage VMEs. Critical foraging area for endangered threatened and protected species which could interact with fishing gear resulting in mortality.
Objectives	• Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of its unique bioregional representativeness; • Protection of its geographic representation; and • Protection of its biodiversity.
SC10 Criteria met	1a, 2b, 3a, 4b and 6a
Characteristics	Presence of unique habitats with a seafloor that includes a series of transform faults and associated fracture zones, potential VME indicator taxa such as hydrothermal vent communities, potentially unique habitats and sensitive geological features. Rare species like Crozet shags and other seabirds and marine mammals forage in this area.
Other	Listed as an EBSA.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing, except longlining, due to the presence of unique habitats, VME indicator taxa and endemic species.
Review period	10 years

Walters Shoal

Figure 13: Location of the Walters Shoal BPA showing the topography (top left) including the cross section taken (red line) and the depth profile along the cross section (top right).

Risk	Bottom trawl fishing within this proposed area could detrimentally impact the biodiversity and damage VMEs.
Objectives	• Protection of potential VMEs; • Protection of its bioregional representativeness; • Protection of biodiversity; and • Protection of an area of special scientific interest.
SC10 Criteria met	1a&b, 2b, 4b, 5a, and 6a
Characteristics	Recognised as a VME with corals and rhodoliths. Hosts endemic species such as *Comanthus wahlbergi tenuibrachia, Jaeropsis waltervadi, Palinurus barbarae* and *Alpheus waltervadi.*
Other	Long period of closure to fishing.
Recommendations	Designate as a BPA and close to bottom fishing, except longlining, due to the presence of unique habitats, the areas recognition as a VME and endemic species.
Review period	10 years